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ABSTRACT

School reform leaders from Chicago (Illinois), Denver (Colorado), New York (New York), Seattle (Washington), Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), and Los Angeles (California) created the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform to work to improve urban education so that all urban youth are well-prepared for postsecondary education, work, and citizenship. Papers in this volume provide insights into an approach advocated by the Cross City Campaign, the small schools movement. The following papers are included: (1) "Introduction: What's So Good about Small Schools? (Michelle Fine); (2) "Beginnings: An interview with David Sherman (United Federation of Teachers) in New York City" (New York); (3) "Urban Dreamcatchers: Planning and Launching New Small Schools" (Jacqueline Ancess); (4) "Small Schools: Spaces for Moral Outrage and Education for Social Justice" (Maxine Greene); (5) "Perspectives: Administrators" (Olivia Ifill-Lynch and Sylvia Gibson); (6) "Perspectives: Teachers" (Michelle Smith); (7) "Authentic Relationships: Honoring the Difficult" (Camilla Greene); (8) "Perspectives: Parents--Holding on to a Dream: Parents' Hopes and Fears for New Small Schools"; (9) "Perspectives: Students"; (10) "Perspectives: P.S. 261" (Arthur Foresta, Mark Buswinka, Billy Holiday, Michael Hopper, and students); (11) "Can the Odds Be Changed? (Deborah Meier); (12) "Marathon High School: Reflection Grounds Dramatic Restructuring" (excerpt from "The Five Schools Study: Restructuring Philadelphia's Comprehensive High Schools" produced by Research for Action for the Philadelphia Education Fund (ED 411 604)); (13) "Essential Elements of Small Schools" (Cross City Campaign); (14) "The Small School Movement: A Review of the Literature" (Robert Gladden); and (15) "The Effects of Size of Student Body on School Costs: New York City High Schools" (Patrice Iatarola, Leanna Steifel, Norm Fruchter, and Robert Berne). (Contains a list of 21 resource organizations and 29 selections for further reading.) (SLD)

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Small Schools

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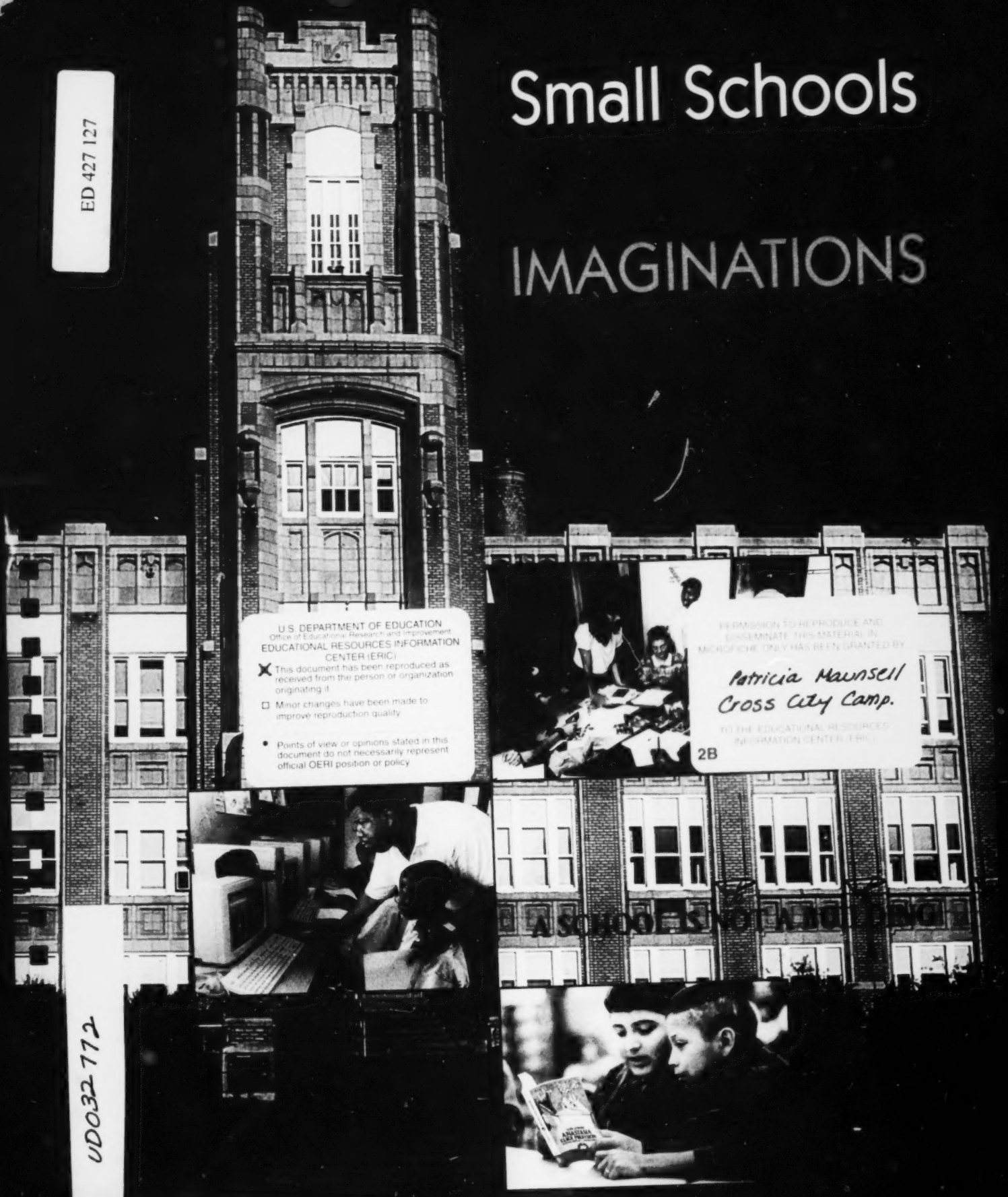

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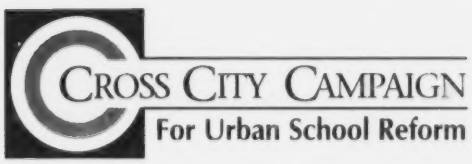
Small Schools

IMAGINATIONS

A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools

Edited by
Michelle Fine and
Janis I. Somerville



CROSS CITY CAMPAIGN
For Urban School Reform

WHO WE ARE

School reform leaders from Chicago, Denver, New York, Seattle, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, all deeply engaged in systemic reforms, created the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. Our collective mission is the dramatic improvement of public education so that all urban youth—especially Black, Latino, Asian, Native American and those from low-income communities—are well prepared for post-secondary education, work and citizenship.

The Cross City Campaign supports the work of reform leaders within and across large cities to create high-quality schools that ensure educational success for young people. The Cross City Campaign advocates for policies and practices that support a radical transformation of schools that move authority, resources and accountability to the school level, that reconnect schools with their community, and that completely rethink the role of school districts. We believe that urban public schools, thus reformed, can be restored to the public trust.

HOW WE WORK

The Cross City Campaign is made up of parents, educators, community organizers, union leaders, funders and others who firmly believe all urban young people can learn and achieve at high levels. We are committed to public schools that challenge and inspire students to explore academically and realize their full potential.

Cross City Campaign participants agree on principles that support our fundamental goal of educating urban young people and preparing them for citizenship, advanced education and work. We believe that meaningful school improvement happens locally through the leadership of teachers, parents, students, administrators and others from the community. These individuals must work together to develop rigorous curriculum, to carry out instruction and to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning, to make budgetary decisions and to successfully manage the many functions of the school. We also strongly believe that this improvement is most likely to happen in learning communities that are small enough to allow for personalized, rigorous instruction where students, their families and educators are well known to each other and can work collaboratively for academic excellence.

The Cross City Campaign welcomes and encourages a diversity of opinions about the specifics of improving city schools. This diversity is one of the Cross City Campaign's strengths and is included in all of our work. Our publications reflect this basic principle by incorporating divergent views on school reform issues, views that are not always endorsed by everyone involved in the Cross City Campaign.

We believe dialogue and debate are critical for real reform to occur. If we are to break through the status quo and make significant improvements in all schools, we must be open to debate and conflict. From struggle and mutual respect will come the power to ensure that all young people get the very best that education has to offer. The Cross City Campaign provides a forum for this critical exchange to occur.

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Foreword

Several years ago, I was privileged to work in a New York City school where lots of poor, historically unsuccessful kids achieved wonderfully—a school that was characterized by what we believed was a magical mix of dedicated staff, meaningful mission, creative instruction, community involvement, strong social supports, and, importantly, small size. More simply put, and to paraphrase the television theme song popular at the time, we were a place "where everybody knew your name" and where success was firmly rooted in familiarity.

More recently, a growing number of similar small, manageable, imaginative schools have emerged—enough schools, in fact, to constitute what has become known as a "small schools movement". Today, in a different role, representing a foundation dedicated to improving outcomes for poor kids and families, I'm privileged to be able to support this movement, which, I believe, embodies some of the best thinking about how teachers, families and communities can collaboratively address and advance the status of urban schools.

The papers presented in this volume provide a range of thoughtful, innovative and sensible insights into the small schools movement. Readers will come away with a stronger sense of why small schools succeed; their history and ethical underpinnings; the important partnering role of teacher unions; the nuts and bolts of planning and implementation; and, importantly, the positive impact that small schools have on the students, teachers, parents, and administrators who support and are supported by these environments.

I believe that parents, policymakers, practitioners and others with an interest and a stake in improving urban education will hear, in this work, a set of practical and provocative voices—voices that speak with the strength, experience and commitment necessary for helping others understand what many have come to firmly conclude: small schools work.

Tony Cipollone
Special Assistant to the President
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Preface

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform has two primary commitments — complete systems of urban public schools accountable for and producing academic excellence for ***all*** students and within those systems, equity for all, regardless of race or class. As a campaign, we work to support the reform efforts of educators, community-based organizers/advocates and parents; we observe schools, interview students, consult with policy makers; and, we collaborate with all participants of the Campaign to distill, understand and spread the critical elements of what makes for effective and democratic urban school reform.

It is in this spirit, and with this diligence, that we recognize and endorse the incredible work of the ***national small schools movement***. Whether we turn to the academic research, sit with urban youth, ask the urban union leadership or survey urban teachers, we hear a consistent cry for small schools in which all youngsters, and all educators, can produce their finest work.

We delight in the national proliferation of small schools and yet now we advocate that districts recognize their obligation to lead and support such schools systemically. Small schools should not be available only to a precious few; nor should small schools require the sweat, toil and endurance of educators who are willing to be heroes. Now that we know small schools produce the optimal conditions for accountability and equity, policy makers have a moral obligation to provide such settings for all youth, especially those who have least benefitted from public education to date — those who are poor or working class, and children of color.

Michelle Fine

section

Creating Small Schools

"In our school, they all know my name and my game. They know I'm the mischievous one—they know what's good and what's bad about me. I like how I experience it; I feel at home."

chapter

Introduction:

What's So Good about Small Schools?

by Michelle Fine

(with Chicago perspective contributed by William Ayers)

"What do I do once I look into their eyes and see them wanting so much, needing so much? How do I begin to move them academically beyond the neglect that they have suffered in schools for so many years?"

Across the country there is a revolution happening within the field of school ing. In urban areas, as well as suburban and rural communities, educators and parents are demanding, creating, and struggling to sustain small, neighborhood-based schools as schools of choice. There is growing literature, both scholarly and popular, that substantiates the positive effects of such small schools. We know that big schools often have harmful effects on many students, teachers, and parents, and that given the right conditions—detailed in the following chapters—small schools can create an academic climate in which a sense of belonging and rich teaching and learning can flourish.

The material that follows provides testimony from communities across the country in the midst of major reform through the creation of small schools. We have produced this work both because we believe that big schools limit quality education and because we know that educators and community members across the United States are looking for information about how to create, sustain, and hold accountable small neighborhood schools.

Our belief in small schools stems from our experience and from well documented empirical studies. When small schools are community based, teacher designed, and heterogeneous—and when they truly have authority over personnel, budget, time, curriculum, and instruction—we have seen them produce improved student outcomes, enriched parental involvement, and very satisfied teachers. In small schools throughout Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Denver, and Seattle, we hear fewer reports of violence and we document greater rates of student "persistence," higher-level pursuit of postsecondary education, and much enhanced parental and community engagement. We hope to share with you, in this honest account, why we have such enthusiasm for small schools; the mistakes we have made that, perhaps, you can avoid; and some of the magnificent accomplishments we have witnessed among small, urban learning communities. At the end, we have listed a set of national resources—people to call, documents to order, and places to visit—as you embark upon the reinvention of schooling in your community.

THE EVIDENCE

Today, the alienating effect of large schools is more profound than ever . . . large school size adversely affects attendance, school climate, and student involvement in school activities and contributes to higher rates of dropping out, vandalism and violence (Oxley, 1994).

On every possible front, hard data solidly support the notion that small schools more effectively address the needs of urban students than their large-scale counterparts (CPS Small Schools Request for Proposals, Sept. 1995). Researchers across the nation have found that—second only to high socio-economic status—small school size is the factor most consistently related to positive outcomes in test scores, student retention, suspensions, postschool employment and college attendance. (Chapter 10, this volume)

For definitional consistency, we borrow the language of Chicago's Small Schools Coalition:

mall size, preferably no more than
350 students in elementary schools,
500 students in high schools;
nesive, self-selected faculty;
bstantial autonomy;
herent curricular focus that provides
ntinuous educational experience;
clusive admissions; and
sitive academic and behavioral
mate.

Small schools should not be confused with other successful reform movements, such as essential schools, school-to-work initiatives, or particular instructional programs or approaches. While by their nature, small schools create learning environments directed by like-minded teachers who share a set of beliefs about teaching and learning and are characterized by educational coherence, small school reform serves as a mechanism for instructional change by empowering teachers to work collaboratively to create schools built upon educational approaches suited to a given student body. Small school reform thus does not require or endorse any particular instructional approach, but creates opportunities for faculty, parents and youth to create lively, educational environments filled with innovation and a sense of accountability.

Despite strong support among educators and parents, however, we continue to hear resistance from centralized bureaucratic (and sometimes union) policies and practices that wish that small schools would flourish—but only as *exceptions*, as *alternatives*, on the *margins*. They should not interfere with the "real" schools, especially high schools—the places where most children "go" to secondary school, or, perhaps more aptly, where most are sent to secondary school, and many stop attending.

Now that there is (1) a ground swell *for* small schools, (2) bureaucratic resistance against them, and (3) studies to determine if these schools are "too expensive" or "too creamy", we admit that "small" is not enough. There are ineffective small schools, like there are ineffective big schools. "Small" is a proxy for a set of conditions designed to maximize learning. We document below the criteria for *good* small schools.

Since 1989, the 22 neighborhood high schools (in Philadelphia) have been redesigned by educators into over 100 small learning communities we call "charters."

SO, WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT SMALL SCHOOLS?

Needless to say, there are bad small schools. Small may be necessary, but it is not a sufficient condition for quality schooling. While there are quite a few good small schools, there are very few, I mean *very* few, good large schools—and those schools usually cream and preselect teachers, students, or both.

Small schools in which teacher turnover is high, student-centered teaching is absent, inquiry is all but absent, and parents are alienated are almost as bad as big schools. But small may be a necessary condition for a nonselective high school to excel. Small is necessary if teachers are to have rich conversations with one another about practice, policy, inquiry, and student work. Small is necessary if students are to feel attached to each other and to faculty. Small is necessary if parents are to connect to faculty along lines other than, "Your son/daughter is in trouble again." Most researchers and practitioners agree that a small school educates between 200 and 500 students; with eight to 20 faculty, who work across disciplines, within a common accountability framework; provides lots of time for teacher talk, lots of opportunities for parent/community engagement; and, lots of room for a sense of participatory involvement by all.

Drawing on what is now a vast literature, it is well accepted that students need small schools. Poor students in particular, but all students in fact, need to feel connected, know they belong, be recognized, inspired, and intellectually engaged. Ted Sizer would say they need to be workers. Lisa Delpit would say they need to learn, and be critically engaged with, the culture of power. Deborah Meier writes that they need to be citizens in a democratic culture. Maxine Greene writes that small schools can promote social justice. All would agree they need to be members of participatory communities that delight in difference and struggle with the rigors of high academic standards. From the research of Gary Wehlage, Diana Oxley, Deborah Meier, Tony Bryk, Fred Neumann, Mary Ann Raywid, Herb Kohl, and others, we know that small delivers. While not all small schools are good, it is very hard for big schools to be anything but disappointing.

So, what happens in these smaller units?

- **There Is a Sense of Belonging:** Teachers get to know students and each other, and so a sense of belonging and mutual accountability emerges. Students in small learning communities are known: someone misses them, calls home when they are sick, notices when they are back. A sense of belonging, as so many researchers have documented, is essential to good schooling, especially for poor and working class children who have relatively few social supports in their lives. But a sense of belonging is not sufficient to create a good school. A good school needs to support students and to make them smart.

- **There Are High Expectations for Student Academic Work:** The best small schools "do" both nurturance and intellectual development. In general, too many schools do one or the other (or neither). For accountability to be authentic, expectations have to be high. We have noticed, anecdotally but consistently, that in these smaller learning communities two things happen. First, expectations go up for all the students. The presumed "gap" by race or class shrinks. Teachers begin to

ask, "Why can't all the students in this small school/charter take a language? Or take advanced math/science?" Second, within smaller learning communities, faculty start to see not only the strengths of students, but their deep and real needs. Once they get beyond students' performances, their masks—which are so easy to display in large, anonymous classrooms—teachers see the sometimes severe needs, gaps, and low personal expectations carried by many urban youngsters. Then they begin the work one teacher described so well: "What do I do once I look into their eyes and see them wanting so much, needing so much? How do I begin to move them academically beyond the neglect that they have suffered in schools for so many years?"

Once high expectations rise, any district has to confront the need for educators who are certified, able, and willing to teach at *advanced* levels to all students—not only a select few. At a number of Philadelphia high schools there was an initial discomfort because one small school "stole" the only language teacher or the only chemistry teacher in the (large high school) building. Though it took a while, it soon became apparent that all the small schools in the building wanted and deserved a language teacher, and all eventually thought their students might be capable of and entitled to rigorous science courses. So tough talk about filling vacancies (and creating some) was undertaken—usually with the "discomforting" prods of parents who demanded to know how many students in their schools/charters were enrolled in "college entrance courses."

- **Teaching and Learning Is Student-Centered and Inquiry-Based:** The best small schools engage students as active learners, ready to tackle tough problems, enlist a variety of resources, and find ways toward solutions—and even more important, toward generating more questions. As in the Urban Academy in New York, inquiry-based learning, generated by and among teachers, assumes that students are responsible learners, that students can develop and pursue complex questions, and that students, teachers, and parents can work together toward co-creating a knowledge base in the classroom. An inquiry-based curriculum also creates a student population and staff equipped to run itself by asking hard questions, searching for data, and making tough decisions—all of which are essential to productive, shared decision making.

- **There Is Self-Assessment and Teacher Accountability**: The strongest learning communities have developed rigorous systems of self-assessment that engage all participants in self-reflection on their own practices and on the school community as a whole. Just as students are expected to perform, exhibit, and keep portfolios in which both teachers and students make comments, so do faculty keep archives of their work in which the comments of students, parents, staff, and outsiders (such as university and community representatives) are recorded. In essence, these portfolios and public conversations spawn a form of local, ongoing accountability. What is needed now is a way to develop or reconcile system goals that are meaningful, rigorous, and compatible with small schools' accountability designs.

As for student assessment: students' projects, exhibitions, portfolios, and performances saturate the small learning communities. The design of the work is fundamentally interdisciplinary, and the criteria for judgement derive from many different faculty, students, parents, and community and university representatives.

- **Violence Is Down:** In small schools across the country, rates of violence are down and educational approaches to conflict resolution are up. As the Chicago Small Schools Coalition notes:

  Small schools also enhance school safety —an issue of growing concern in cities such as Chicago. Research indicates a direct correlation between small school structure and the reduction, if not elimination, of violent and disruptive student behavior (See Hechinger, "Charting New Paths to Safety," *Carnegie Quarterly*, Winter 1994). Unlike big schools, "where students move about anonymously, giv[ing] free reign to the kind of adolescent behavior that leads to conflict and violence," in small schools "students develop a strong sense of place and accountability" (Meier, 1993, quoting John Falco, District Four Administrator).

- **Parental Involvement Is Up**: In some small schools, where parents are at the center of school life, even high school parents report high levels of engagement. At one large school, a record number of 10-15 parents came to Parents Night, but when the individual small schools ("charters" in Philadelphia) have a Family Night in the building—designed for their parents/significant adults and their students—it is not unusual for 50 to 75 adults to attend.

- **Locally-Generated Professional Development Is Designed to Support Teaching and Learning:** As small schools emerge, it becomes very important that the faculty have access to *meaningful* professional development opportunities that meet their needs within and across communities, and that raise questions about day-to-day practice. Some faculty have requested group dynamics consultation; some teachers need assistance conceptualizing inquiry; some teachers want to learn more about multicultural curriculum; and others will now honestly admit, "I don't know enough math to teach what needs to be taught in higher-level classes. Get me some individual help." Most—indeed, all—need time to talk among themselves and recognize the talents in their own midst.

  Within these contexts, professional development must include *time* for faculty (sometimes with parents and social-service professionals) to discuss student work, across disciplines and specializations; *time* for serious talk about expectations, writing, and the newest in math technology; *time* with local professors discussing interdisciplinary curricular possibilities around the theme of immigration being taught in math, English, social studies, and science; *time* with faculty from a local community college to discuss holistic scoring for writing, or with the faculty from a neighborhood middle school to talk about middle-to-high school transitions.

GETTING SMALL

Let's review briefly the strategies for "getting small" and what happens when you do it.

When Big High Schools Break Into Smaller Schools: Voices From Philadelphia

Wandering the halls of Bartram High School in Philadelphia, a building now filled with six separate charters, or "minischools," the custodian remarks, "Floors never been cleaner. Last year by this time of the year, we'd have three fights a day. I can count three fights so far this year." What's the difference, we ask? "These small schools, the kids think they own them!" Later in the week, the principal suggests that maybe one of the charters should "move across the street, in with a middle school, and create a 6-to-12, and move some small elementary schools in here." The image of a truly community-based set of schools fills the air.

Daryl, age 17, an African American special education student since age seven when he "punched a teacher—that was when they had taken me from my mom and put me in foster care," explains: "So they got me in one of those charters. Yeah, first time I'm in regular classes, and I've still got Ms. Yancey—my favorite, she saves me all the time—to help me out. You know I'm taking a *literature course* and she's helping me with reading. All my classes, I know everyone and they know me."

Bob and Marsha, teachers in the Crossroads charter, dream a bit aloud: "If we had a fully evolved small school, we'd join up with a feeder school that also belongs to the Coalition of Essential Schools. Then our students would come in understanding what it means to be an intellectual—to struggle with inquiry, questions of language, power, groups, and public performances. We'd go year round. Our students will always speak to you about their reflections on learning."

By 1995, Philadelphia, New York, and other cities had begun to move toward a systemic approach of "breaking down" big high schools into small schools, creating new small schools, and growing more intimate and smart communities of adults and children. Philadelphia, in particular, modeled the hard work of working with/breaking down existing schools—big, anonymous, neighborhood high schools—and, by so doing, learned the wonderful lesson that you can take the same students from the very poorest and from the most middle-class communities, with the same teachers—averaging 20 years of tenure in the system—and transform dysfunctional "big schools" into multiple, caring, intellectually rich, small learning communities. Since 1989, the 22 neighborhood high schools have been redesigned by educators into over 100 small learning communities we call "charters."

In the ideal charter, faculty share responsibility for a cohort of students who are educated together across their four years in high school. Charters result in diplomas and prepare all students toward college and/or employment—and the student body must be, by definition, heterogeneous. School buildings should be filled with relatively autonomous, quite diverse, and accountable charters.

We knew from existing evidence that such structures could support historically low-achieving students. (Oxley, 1989; Raywid, 1997; Wehlage, 1989) As one teacher put it, "More middle class kids have the support and community and networks.

These [less advantaged] kids need it—and the charter delivers just that. A safe community in which they can learn, experiment, and be nurtured."

These smaller communities are necessary —if not sufficient—for rich, relational, and accountable teaching and learning. We took our cue from elite private schools and a vast literature demonstrating over and over that large neighborhood urban high schools are a threat to the intellectual and emotional well being of students, teachers, and parents, while smallness is necessary for adult reflection and student engagement.

At the peak of the reform movement, more than 60 percent of neighborhood high school students in Philadelphia were attending "charters," that is, small schools. Teachers still have typically large urban loads, but they share their students over four years with their charter colleagues. Common prep times are spent discussing curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues; worrying about and delighting in individual students; planning Family Nights for "significant adults and children" in the lives of their students; strategizing how to get Christina over the death of her father or Paul not to move down south or Mr. Rodriguez not to deprive Luz of the charter trip to visit a college.

Professional development—in the form of ongoing conversations among charter colleagues about teaching and learning — saturates charter life. There is still not enough *time*, but every available opportunity is grabbed for teacher, student, and sometimes parent talk about teaching and learning. Natalie Hiller, chemistry teacher, makes vivid her charter life: "It's put a smile on my lips and bags under my eyes."

Groups of charter teachers, with administrators and parents, are now involved in school-based policy making and in year-round seminars of their own design. Because they are teacher-directed, small schools release and capture the most valuable asset available to public education —the creative energy and spirit of its teachers. In small school settings, teachers work cooperatively with each other to devise educational strategies to address the particular strengths and needs of their students.

Research demonstrates, as a result, that teachers in small schools hold high expectations for their students, are optimistic about student success, and are prepared to take on the extended role of caring for and educating the whole student. Within an ever evolving accountability framework, some teachers are studying and inventing authentic assessments. Others are integrating vocational and academic work. Quite a few are exploring school-community links. Many are creating interdisciplinary curriculum, developing multicultural classrooms, infusing technology into instruction, and sharing with charter teachers from across the city a seminar on teaching and learning. Hard public talk—about racism, accountability, disengaged peers—has been legitimized. Student outcomes are up and violence is down. Within charters in Philadelphia and small schools in New York and elsewhere, faculty engage in once taboo, still difficult, always rich conversations about the nature of learning and teaching in urban America.

Natalie Hiller, chemistry teacher, makes vivid her charter life: "It's put a smile on my lips and bags under my eyes."

"In my old school, it was all blackboard work. Here, there are projects. It's not boring! We have a commitment, like a responsibility, like we say, to help the disruptive kids. We're going to have two or three of us talk to each one and help them, instead of calling their parents or teachers in."

Further, small schools offer a mechanism for providing school options *within* the public school system. A single 1,000-student community school can be replaced —perhaps within the same school building —by four small schools. Building and school are fundamentally decoupled. The creation of new, smaller schools affords families, students, and teachers the opportunity to choose the school that best meets their own needs—within or beyond neighborhood boundaries.

Along with these organizational changes from large schools into charters, veteran teachers in Philadelphia have radicalized what they know to be necessary to produce better student outcomes. These teachers, along with some parents and community members, constitute a budding, energized and, to some, "irritating" social movement, voicing demands that have discomforted both the school board in Philadelphia and the teachers' union:

> Don't bounce teachers out of the charter because the school has a momentary drop in enrollment; don't simply assign the next most senior person on the list to our charter. Teachers need individual and collective stability; we need time during the day to plan, reflect, and build curriculum; we need to interview our peers to assure that they know, and we know, that we can live together as a community. Let's have buildings in which small elementary, middle, and secondary schools share space with a community center and room for teachers to work on teaching and learning (Fine's interview, composite comments, 1992).

These issues would be central to the making of any community, but they had been, until now, considered unspeakable. Hierarchical, disempowering bureaucracies, and sometimes equally troubling contractual policies, have kept these teachers from speaking and from hearing students' voices, parents' desires, and their colleagues' passions (Fine, 1989). Small educational communities are a fundamental—and hopeful—assault on such centralized, nonaccountable, and inequitable systems. These are the rich, encouraging, "breath of fresh air" fights that can be heard echoing through the halls of most of Philadelphia's high schools.

Moving from "what is" to "what could be" in the same building, with the same people, systemwide, means there have been and will be growing pains. It also means students most in need have a chance at being positively affected by the reform. Philadelphia inched toward "scale" by creating a rich and deep diaspora of small, teacher-designed, neighborhood-based learning communities. The ripples of both energy and resistance swell.

This Is How Students Feel in Small Schools: Voices From New Schools Created in New York

Unlike the small schools carved out of big schools in Philadelphia, New York City has spawned a set of *new* small secondary schools through the New Visions and Campus Coalition Initiatives. From these schools we have learned how urban students experience small schools. We hear that students who are new to small schools may resist, initially, the intimacy, the "in your face-ness" of small schools. But over time they get spoiled—and enjoy it.

We turn now to a focus group of "small school" high school students.

Javelle explains, "In the beginning lots of kids couldn't get used to the environment —knowing everyone and working in groups. They were gonna leave. I was almost one of them. Now, I like being known." Joe explains, "In my school they call me Little Dink because I'm so small. In a big school, I wouldn't feel so good about them yelling that down the hall. But here, I know it's a joke."

Students made it clear that in small, cooperative environments, *cross-peer learning* flourishes side by side with faculty teaching. "If you don't know what's going on, you can learn from other students or from the teacher," Veronica explains. Javelle chimes in, "It's a bonding thing."

Susanna delights that in her small school, "There's no tracking. Nobody feels like they are stupid. In my parochial school, there was lots of tracking, and I was on the top but I never met other kids and they get to feeling stupid. Here, you don't have to feel embarrassed. We encourage kids who are learning slower, and everybody's got room to help."

Alexandra worries, "In big schools, you get into fights. Or you don't talk to anyone: you mind your business so no one's in your face. It's better in a small school. I'm practically friends with everyone." Maria joins with a head nod: "Kids these days are temperamental. But since you know them, it don't blow. In big schools, someone is always flipping."

Joanne compares teaching and learning in her small school with her previous "big" school: "In my old school, it was all blackboard work. Here, there are *projects*. It's not boring! We have a commitment, like a responsibility, like we say, to help the disruptive kids. We're going to have two or three of us talk to each one and help them, instead of calling their parents or teachers in."

All of the students allow themselves to talk about how in small schools they develop what I have come to think of as "kaleidoscope perspectives" or styles. That is, they can't freeze into a narrow or defensive stance—a singular or rigid way of seeing or of being in the world. Instead, they float gracefully across "selves," trying on ways of being an adolescent and still being responsible. This context is a gift for adolescents who often freeze early—and tight.

Javelle says, "When I was in the big school, I hated it. When I'd come—and not that often—I argued and got kicked out. Here, in 8th grade, a light went on. My grades went up. My mom and I got closer. That's how I met a lot of people. I am getting the education I need, and it's free. In the other school, I was absent for half the school year."

Veronica, a friendly, bright Latina explains, "If you're in a big school, I would feel intimidated. If you don't participate, you lose points, but if you do the kids might, you know, make fun. So no matter what you do, in a big school you are just passing, whatever you do. If I was in a big school, I'd probably be more temperamental."

James says, "This school just changed me. I was a nerd, I have to say. I changed my damn image. Feels good. The closeness of teachers and parents—I like it and I don't like it. I am not a perfect student, and they all talk about me all the time."

Veronica closes the session: "At a small school, we feel like we know each other so well, we can't disrespect anyone. I feel very responsible for everyone at the school. In my old school, boys would disrespect girls, but not here. . . because we all know each other and we'll get on each other."

These students make it clear that the fault lines of race, gender, and academic achievement that often divide, fracture, and *define* large schools are more porous and negotiable, and far less fractious, in a small school. The glue of community seeps across lines of "difference." In small schools, there appear to be fewer reports of sexual harassment, and a diminished likelihood that students of color will "sink" to the bottom, engage in violence, and/or develop hostile attitudes toward faculty or academic achievement.

Sam prides himself on the "wonderful ratio of students to faculty at my school. We're an original! In our school, they all know my name and my game. They know I'm the mischievous one—they know what's good and what's bad about me. I like how I experience it; I feel at home."

Honesty marks these adolescents' conversations. When I ask about students who "don't make it," the authenticity of their remarks shines in contrast to adults, who usually try to find a way to "justify" the facts. Charles says, "Oh, the sour apples. They fell off the tree. What happens is that the tree loses its apples, but it's funny, the branches come in. We are like a family." Even small schools lose some students, and they mourn the loss and worry about where the apples roam.

When an Outside-Inside Strategy Promotes Small Schools: Perspective from Chicago

Small schools are, in many ways, a metaphor for something more: students at the center of the educational enterprise; students known well for their assets and capacities, as well as their needs, by caring adults; students participating in an intense and intimate community of learners; teachers as thinkers, doers — curriculum makers focused on the intellectual and ethical aspects of teaching; teachers as fully responsible and accountable for the content and conduct of the enterprise and for the success of a manageable group of children; and families as deeply connected to and fully embraced by a school community. Realizing these goals requires a serious and sustained effort to restructure, rethink, and reculturalize schools, and to build capacity on many levels.

Beginning in the early 1990's teachers, parents, and school-level administrators started the serious work of creating small schools. This growing mass of small schools created such a groundswell that in 1995, Mayor Richard M. Daley gave a speech in which he argued that no public high school should be larger than 500 students. Headlines the following day announced that small schools would be the next step in Chicago's march toward a successful education experience for its children and youth. Editorials followed and the city was abuzz with a dialogue on small schools. Within months the Board of Trustees of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) passed a resolution stating that, "The Trustees are committed to the goal of assisting the formation and strengthening of Small Schools in Chicago....[because] Small Schools are a hopeful avenue for improvement of public education at both elementary and high school levels." With this endorsement, the organizing and hard creative work of building small schools that had been going on for at least three years prior to the passage of the CPS resolution had reached a critical plateau: the simple but powerful idea that small schools provide a necessary framework for school success for both students and teachers had taken hold and had reached the most powerful offices in the system and the city.

Advocacy remains an important aspect of the strategy of the small schools movement. The life-blood of advocacy, however, is action and specific small steps taken toward larger transformations. In recent years elementary and secondary small school reformers — who include educators, parents, community organizers, advocates and others — can point to several advances: a first-wave of risk-taking teachers initiating the creation of new small schools (often schools-within-schools) seeking independence and autonomy; a large shuttered high school renovated and reopened by the Board as a "multiplex", home to several small schools under one big roof; a "request for proposals" process from the Board inviting groups of teachers to articulate plans for small schools and to seek support from an "insider-outsider" group (CPS staff and reformers working collaboratively) in inventing new small schools; and new "charter school" legislation in Illinois leading to several more small school initiatives in Chicago. It is now possible for reformers to ground and energize their advocacy in several concrete examples of successful small schools flourishing right here in "sweet home Chicago."

Several challenges remain. One, small schools can become a cliché or an arid definitional conceit. There is also the tendency of educators to embrace the rhetoric of change without grasping the complexity and depth of what is actually to be done. Then, there is the district, which must find ways to extend its early support of small schools — something that has not happened consistently. Clearly, there is a long way to go in both advocacy and action to fight for the substance of small schools as a restructuring strategy in Chicago. There are no easy victories.

Another challenge is to fight to hold on to the fragile beginnings of small schools practice while maintaining a vision of, and building a movement toward, an entire system of good, effective schools for all children in the city. Most of the first-generation schools are organized into Annenberg-supported networks, and the charter schools have an advocacy network of their own. A Small Schools Coalition supports the existence and expansion of small schools throughout the system and struggles with the need to both consolidate and expand simultaneously. The Small Schools Workshop (SSW) at the University of Illinois at Chicago works with schools within the district to restructure and create smaller learning environments, while also providing professional development for educators.

Perhaps the most critical challenge now is to seize the moment to attempt to restructure big, failing high schools into small schools in an attempt to change relationships, expectations, norms, and standards, and chances for success. Several high schools have been put on "probation" or "reconstitution" by the CPS

Board. As a "probation partner" to high schools, the Small Schools Workshop is employing a small schools restructuring strategy to transform them into effective learning communities.

All across the country the question of whether we can create successful urban schools for ordinary city kids has been answered with a resounding "yes". The question now is, can a system of successful schools be built, and can failing schools be transformed with today's teachers, students and families? Can the leadership be persuaded to support such efforts, and can their support be sustained? Chicago is a work in progress, a workshop of hope and struggle.

STUDENT OUTCOMES: ACCOUNTABILITY AS THE LITMUS FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM

Because of an extensive student database and access to a comparative sample of "non-small school" students, we can turn to Philadelphia to ask about student outcomes in small schools—the litmus for systemic reform. While we know that small learning communities comfort and support students and teachers, do we have any evidence that students in small schools out-attend, out-persist, and out-succeed academically relative to peers?

A statistical analysis of the impact of charters on student outcomes conducted by the Center for Applied Policy Development (CAPD) reveals very encouraging evidence about the early impact of charters on student achievement. McMullan (1994) writes:

TABLE 1

DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES BETWEEN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ONE OR MORE CHARTER COURSES AND OTHER STUDENTS

Ninth-Grade Students Only
1992/93 School Year

Outcome	Charter Students	Noncharter Students
Percent Earning 4 Or More Credits During 12-Month Academic Year	57.1%	42.0%*
Percent Promoted	59.8%	45.4%*
Percent Passing:		
English	63.4%	55.8%*
Mathematics	55.1%	52.7%*
Social Studies	65.1%	62.3%*
Science	67.2%	59.0%*
Average Daily Attendance	71.2%	60.4%
Sample Size	7,417	7,815

* The difference between charter students and noncharter students is significant at the .01 level.

TABLE 2

DIFFERENCES IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES BETWEEN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THREE OR MORE CHARTER COURSES AND OTHER STUDENTS

Ninth-Grade Students Only
1992/93 School Year

Outcome	Charter Students	Noncharter Students
Percent Earning 4 Or More Credits During 12-Month Academic Year	65.1%	40.9%*
Percent Promoted	67.5%	44.4%*
Percent Passing:		
English	67.3%	54.7%*
Mathematics	58.5%	50.9%*
Social Studies	68.0%	60.7%*
Science	70.7%	55.8%*
Average Daily Attendance	76.7%	59.7%*
Sample Size	5,322	9,910

* The difference between charter students and noncharter students is significant at the .01 level.

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Our findings show that *even controlling for a range of factors that may help explain the differences in performance between charter students and students not in charters*, there remains a statistically significant difference in performance between the two groups. This means that by the most rigorous standards we could impose, and given that implementation of charters has fallen short in many ways, there remains a genuine, persisting effect of charters on student performance. Further, when we use a more realistic definition of being in a charter—attempting at least 3 credits in a home charter—we see a stronger net effect of charters. In combination, these findings suggest that participation in charters is beneficial to students and, further, that if implementation of charters is strengthened, this benefit can be even more substantial.

The CAPD data are most compelling because the researchers found that charters had *over-enrolled* poor, "at risk" students (see Tables 1 and 2). McMullan writes:

- Chapter 1 eligible [students] are *over represented* among students assigned to charters (53.4%) and even more *over represented* among students taking three or more courses in their home charter (55.2%). . . It is further important to notice. . . that schools which started at the "Low Starting Point"—often those with the greatest concentrations of poverty—gained the most in terms of academic achievement gains over these 4 years of reform.

No doubt, the school and charter student achievement data tell a tough story of urban public high schooling. The evidence, nevertheless, demonstrates that students in small learning communities, disproportionately poor and of color, outachieved their nonchartered peers on a number of standard outcomes, including attendance and course passage.

SMALL SCHOOLS: AN ENTITLEMENT FOR ALL

It's a simple, if romantic notion—students do best in settings where they are known, cared for, and challenged intellectually over many years by a stable community of educators. Teachers talk better. Parents get engaged.

Shouldn't every child, teacher, and parent be entitled to such an education? Why should such an education be available disproportionately to those who can afford to leave the public schools? Broad-based commitments to social equity require us to provide for poor and working class children that which we know works best for all children. *And to dismantle schools known to be educational failures.* In this case, we must commit to offering all students access to small public schools, supported by sustained professional development and rich community engagement, and held accountable to rigorous learning outcomes. Further, we must commit to closing down those schools that we know are teaching few, alienating many, and shutting off the minds of most students, parents, and faculty alike.

Never has an urban district insisted that all children receive such education. In many cities, a few small schools have been established only to be starved for the professional development dollars necessary to sustain themselves intellectually. Even more common, professional development is offered centrally, in ways that bear little relation to either local, school-based needs *or* to a serious districtwide accountability framework. Recently, districts and states across the country have developed and implemented accountability frameworks with inadequate dollars for professional development, no meaningful attachment to the real work of teachers on the ground, and no structural transformation of those features of school life known to be educationally disadvantageous for children and educators. But at the core of the small-schools movement across the country lie many small learning communities, saturated in professional development and community engagement, flourishing within a rich and challenging accountability framework. Smiling, smart students—and faculty and often parents.

It takes so little to enhance possibilities for youth, especially those who are poor and working class. This is our moral obligation. The remainder of this volume looks at small schools through the eyes of teachers, students, parents, administrators, union leaders, and researchers. It addresses common questions posed of small schools—questions about leadership, negotiation, and teaching and learning. We offer this work to inform—and provoke—so that the small-schools movement can be enriched, sustained, and held accountable in communities across the nation.

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chapter

Beginnings:

An Interview with David Sherman

David Sherman, vice president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City, talks about the origins of the city's small schools and the union's role in supporting them. He was interviewed in October 1995 by Michelle Fine and Janis Somerville.

"We still get bombarded with inquiries from all over the country, from other unions, as to 'Is it true? I have heard something but I know it can't be true that you agreed to closing some schools.'"

New York City has been in the forefront of creating these small schools, and the UFT has been in the forefront of facilitating such schools and making sure that they don't just happen on the margins. Can you talk about the different examples in New York of ways in which small schools have gotten started?

Small schools really got started in a number of different ways. The common mythology is that there were two or three organizations that got this whole thing going. While the Fund for New York City Public Education and the New York City branch of the Coalition of Essential Schools—which is called the Center for Collaborative Education—were leaders in terms of the number of schools that they started, they were among other groups that led these schools into being.

When you look at the 50 new small schools that opened, you are talking about new small schools that were counted officially from the formal plan that was first launched under Chancellor Joe Fernandez. The number of new small schools in the city is actually much higher than that because there are lots of others—we call them "entities" for lack of a better word. I would say the number is probably somewhere between 80 and 90. The number of 50 or 51 small schools that were started last year and the year before, all included the high school grades in their ultimate plan. So only schools that include the high school grades are on the formal list. You have small elementary schools around the city that have come about. You have spinoffs of larger schools where they have established smaller schools in elementary school buildings and those are not counted among them, but I would say the number is close to 80 or 90.

For the New Visions schools, the Fund for New York City Public Education received a large grant from the Aaron Diamond Foundation to launch a citywide initiative that would provide the impetus for school and community people, arts organizations, libraries, people in higher education—people from all different areas—to come together to dream their dream school. Teachers have always said, "If I could design my own school," and here was the opportunity to do that. There was a

request for proposals process and New Visions was a good name for it because it really was a vision. They sent out 16,000 RFP's and received close to 300 proposals. Many of the plans from the schools that came in were very grounded, and some were very spacey in a fun way. Some had some great ideas that warmed your heart, but they never would have worked.

It was over a fairly short period of time, wasn't it?

It was over about three months, which is a relatively short period of time. There was a lot of skepticism throughout the city about this, because uninformed charter school talk was going on all over the place. I wouldn't call it negative; I would call it worry. At the UFT, we were very much a part of this. We were involved—Sandy Feldman [UFT president] sits on the board of the Fund, and they established a board for the New Visions schools, which I am on, as well as a whole group of exceptional people. Many of our people, our members, our field staff, weren't prepared for it. Some were very threatened by it, and it was really tough for the UFT leadership because here we are going to teachers and other educators and saying, "Be open to it."

We felt that the way it was being done was positive—it was inclusive. By that I mean that there were some basic agreements. You couldn't have an elitist school; you couldn't have a school that would require any kind of screening to get in. You had to include a student body that was representative of the diversity of the city, including limited-English-speaking students, as well as disabled students. It couldn't be selective in terms of geography, neighborhood. They wanted a cross section of the whole city.

There was a process that included a cross section of readers, including several teachers. I was personally involved—I was on the interview team for the finalists. From 300 applications, it came down to 12 that first year. It went up to 15 in the second year. They were one group of the 50 new schools.

What's interesting, and an often overlooked fact, is that there were many more schools other than the 50, many of them schools that came about even though they were unsuccessful applicants for New Visions. Some of them used planning money. They went into a Title I Schoolwide Project, and they planned—not only their instructional program, but while they were at it, they decided, "Let's make it a new small school that isn't connected to a larger school." In a way, that's the untold story. The Fund also brought together some of the different applicants who didn't make it. The applicants merged some of their concerns, and they developed more new schools.

"Many...[small schools] came about even though they were unsuccessful applicants for New Visions. Some of them used planning money. They went into a Title I Schoolwide Project, and they planned not only their instructional program, but while they were at it, they decided, 'Let's make it a new small school that isn't connected to a larger school.'"

The schools that were involved with the Coalition [for Essential Schools], the new ones that got started, were basically schools that would be moving into two large comprehensive high schools, one in Manhattan and one in the Bronx. These were failing schools—they were failing the kids. They were closed by the school system, with the support of the UFT. That was a second very unusual position, and to this day, we still get bombarded with inquiries from all over the country, from other unions, as to "Is it true? I have heard something but I know it can't be true that you agreed to closing some schools." I say, "Yes, it is true," and they say, "Why?" And I say, "Because they were horrible places and they were robbing kids of an education and teachers were miserable there," even though some of them didn't know how miserable they were. Teachers were not doing what they are there to do, and they were, for the most part, schools that were out of control, violent and all of that. They were schools that had died. They had just died. You went in there and you felt nothing. There were some worse schools in terms of incidents of violence and other indicators. Violence wasn't the sole criterion. These were schools where education had come to a standstill. It wasn't the fault of the kids; it wasn't the fault of the teachers.

They clearly did have one common thread in that there was no leadership—there was no management. Everybody agreed about this, and the reason we supported the school-closing policy and have continued to is that it is our position that if a school has demonstrated itself to fail kids in terms of its ability to educate them, we would rather see it closed and redesigned the right way, with very broad input from everybody (parents, teachers, community, everything), and then reopened as a new school.

For the same neighborhood kids? This is really important because New York has had a history of closing schools and then reopening them with other selection criteria.

Same kids. The Coalition was given an opportunity to take these two large structures—because space in the small school movement became the first immediate problem; everyone thought they were educators and they wound up being real estate barons and baronesses. Time and space—those are the two biggest immediate problems. The Coalition came up with an idea of "hot-housing" schools — of starting new smaller schools outside of the building prior to the building's being ready and then moving them into the larger building at a later date.

It has worked very well with some and not with others—like everything else, which I think is fine. None of this is perfect, and none of this is a total success or failure. Some of them took an idea that had worked over the years in one school and adapted it into a design for a new school in a new place with a new population. For example, International High School, an alternative school in Queens—in my opinion among the best—had teachers who adapted the theme of the school into other places. They took a lot of what was in the school, and they worked with new communities using a proven model of achievement. They're spinoffs—so now we have two wonderful spinoff schools in addition to the original.

How did teacher-directors, not principals as we know them, get to be directors of these schools?

There was a selection process for all of the new schools, with the exception of the Coalition schools. The Coalition picked their own directors—very quickly. It was really a very closed process. The Coalition schools were very much molded on people. That's a common objection to some of the schools—that they are dependent upon the charisma, talent, brilliance, creativity of one individual—and it is a problem. Many of the others had a process that involved teachers, administrators, and parents; but the Coalition schools picked their people, and they groomed them and helped them and interned them. The directors had a year to plan their schools in the Coalition, and what the Coalition did with them was very good in many cases. They got them ready. It was a very good process, but it didn't work with everybody because they came out with some lemons. But that's what happens.

So you've got a couple of different starts. The New Visions schools are coming out of the community. Then you've got some of the folks who didn't get selected for New Visions who launched schools anyway under the auspices of 110 Livingston [the School District's Central Office]. Then you've got Coalition schools that are reoccupying buildings with multiple schools. Then there are some high schools that took it upon themselves to break into small schools.

There's a group before that—the new high schools that opened the same year as the first New Visions schools. All this activity was getting lots of play, and there were outside organizations coming to the school system saying, "We would like to work to create a new school." The school system gave them the go-ahead and said, "Work on it and see what you can come up with because we are dealing with the New Visions and we're dealing with all of these others." There was quite a large group of schools that came out of that. I would say that out of your formal 50, about 20 were new high schools that fell into the same category: they were small; they were theme-based; they were collaborative; they almost always involved the school with at least one outside partner. They were strictly high schools—grades 9 to 12—except for a few exceptions.

And were they located somewhere out in the community, not in the traditional buildings?

Right, not in traditional buildings. They were located in all different places and some of them are more traditional than others, but they are not traditional schools. For example, most of the people who headed these up, most but not all, are people who had assistant principal licenses. Some of them had even been principals in other schools. Some of them had been teacher-directors. There was no formula. Some of them are amongst the best new schools that we have, and some of them have not worked well—like everything else.

Let me give you some real-life examples. You have the Thurgood Marshall Academy, initiated by a nonprofit development organization affiliated with the Abyssinian Baptist Church. There is no example that we have of a church, per se, running a school. These are community organizers that are church connected, but they are not breaking the Bill of Rights. What is important is that they are public schools that offer public school alternatives to private and parochial schools.

And they hire teachers who have credentials and are in the union and are paid well? That's what is true of all of these—that they have certified teachers who have met all of the requirements?

Not necessarily certified. They are people who have a teaching certificate of some type. You have a lot of uncertified teachers working in these schools—but that's a whole other story.

I think it's the case that almost every CUNY [City University of New York] campus has a small school—Brooklyn, Medgar Evers, Kingsborough, Bronx Community, etc.

Kingsborough [Community College] is an example of one of these high schools, on the Kingsborough campus. It's a great school, a real model of collaboration between K-12 and higher education. There's also LaGuardia and Bronx [Community Colleges].

Then you had other schools that came into being. I'll give you some examples. You have single-school initiatives, and each one of them is a story unto itself. There's no pattern. You had a school, called Beginning With Children, which was begun by two individuals, Carol and Joe Reich, successful business people who decided to give up their careers and some of what they had earned and put it to new uses. They started a foundation called the Beginning With Children Foundation, and that's what they do. I know them and have worked with them. They are terrific people.

They went to Pfizer [a pharmaceutical company], which donated a building—actually, Pfizer sold them a building for a dollar—in an industrial area in the

Williamsburg section of Brooklyn to start a new, early childhood school that would grow to include other grades. That was in 1991.

You go there now and it's one of those schools you have to be pulled out of because it is such a wonderful place. It is not a high school. It doesn't fall in the list of 50. So you have a lot of things like that. We were very involved because it wasn't getting off the ground until Carol Reich called Sandy Feldman and said, "Listen, we can't budge the system; you've got to help." They came to us and we helped broker the bureaucracy with them. That's a major problem with most of these schools—they need facilitation. They don't know how to deal with the system. The system sometimes is very helpful, and at other times it's very resistant.

Many other small schools have evolved. You have a whole range of initiatives where some of the local districts on their own had started some things; it was usually specific to certain districts. There were certain districts in the city that were very educationally open and progressive. You have a lot of new, or not so new, small schools/programs. That's a big problem because, "What is a school?"

You have a lot of those, mostly concentrated in three districts in Manhattan—District 2, District 3 (on the upper West Side), and District 4 (East Harlem). There are a few other districts in the city that have done it outside of Manhattan but not in a concentrated way. And I think it really comes from the culture and philosophy of the local district or the leadership. There's Tony Alvarado [Superintendent of District 2], who took District 2, a very diverse community that goes from some of the richest real estate in the world to some of the most poverty-impacted areas of the city—sweat shops in Chinatown, or Hell's Kitchen—and he has done some miraculous things. In District 2, there are 28 buildings with 40-some schools. There were middle schools that were failing, and Alvarado, with the UFT's support, closed down three different buildings and converted them into multischool complexes. One of them was in the theater district and it's now a performing arts school, and there's a public school extension of Bank Street College's early childhood center, and other really exciting things.

Can you come up with one more example?

There were other schools in the city that were more severely problematic—violence-prone, failing kids, horrible places to teach, community frustration with the school—and there were very concerted efforts to close these schools down. The best example is Andrew Jackson High School in Queens, which is not far from Kennedy Airport. It's in a neighborhood of low- and middle-class homeowners, predominantly African American. The community was very supportive of quality education.

The school was a disaster. It was a violent school that had one of the highest incidences of dropouts. Every bad statistic you could name, this school had. There was a collective push by the UFT and by the school system (mainly through Peg Harrington, the Queens High School superintendent) and by local politicians, community groups, and churches. Everybody wanted the school closed, with the exception of many of the teachers. So while it was fine for everyone else to talk about closing it, it was a particular problem for the UFT.

The UFT worked with the faculty. Sandy Feldman and our high school vice-president went in, along with people in our Queens office, to talk with our members. They were hardly welcomed. These were people who, for the most part, were traditional educators and trade

unionists, and they knew that nothing positive would come out of that school. People of different mind sets ultimately came together, and that's what made it so wonderful. But getting to that point was really difficult. Basically, what we had to do was take on the role of leadership. We brought people along. We explained that this was not good for kids. No one's happy here. But resistance to change, which is always a problem, prevailed.

Then we worked out an arrangement with the school system whereby people in the school would have a priority to transfer to other schools in the borough of Queens or they would have the ability to apply to be in one of the four new schools that Andrew Jackson High School was being turned into. There were four, small, theme-based high schools—arts and humanities, law and government, business, and a pre-med type of school. Each one is a separate school. They have certain shared facilities, but each one is an autonomous school that happens to be located within one building. They now have a committee amongst the four schools that has representative people (an administrator, a teacher, a student) from the different schools who come together for buildingwide issues, really important day-to-day practical issues such as when do we each get into the gym. It's tough, but it's working.

So what you had was a process worked out in which the union played the rightful role of the union. We tried to balance being educationally proactive and representing our members. People were unhappy because it was a very senior teaching staff—many of them had been there for many years—but it worked well. One year later we went back to them wherever they were—either in that same building in one of the new schools or in other high schools around the borough—and with few exceptions even the loudest skeptics agreed that it was the best thing that ever happened to them professionally. They were all revitalized. To the people who stayed in the school, it was like a new professional world. And for the people who left the school, there was a very careful matching of their talents, backgrounds, and interests with the school that they went to, and they had a choice. We gave them a choice.

Look at the building [that was Jackson High School] now. I've been in these schools several times over the years. It's great. It's a whole new place. What you have is many more community kids coming back into the school. It used to be a stigma: the only kids who went to that school were kids who couldn't get into any other school. Now you have kids wanting to go there and they have many more applications than they have seats. They have become schools of choice. It's the same building with some of the same staff, but a whole new educational program, new leadership, and a tremendously renewed educational vigor and rigor in terms of what they are doing.

That process is now being discussed with several other large, troubled schools around the city. The UFT's role is partner, not opponent, because the process has worked. We are working to improve the quality of education, and it's tough. Each school has to be handled with the myriad problems that it brings—personalities, issues, grievances, fears. There's no formula because each school is different. The communities are different. The politics are different. The teachers are different.

Much like tending to a newborn baby, growing a new school requires feeding on demand and watching to learn how to respond to its needs and guide its growth. Such tending can help a new school develop momentum and a life of its own.

Can you talk about the UFT's involvement with the teacher selection process?

With these new schools proliferating, we negotiated things outside of the standing contract. We negotiated a new procedure for teacher selection, not only in these new schools but in schools that were educationally different or unique. Basically, what we were saying is that we wanted an open, collaborative, flexible process by which teachers could be selected and the overriding criterion had to be the educational needs of the school.

The Board of Education's management negotiators were opposed to this. This new approach to teacher selection was a UFT proposal that management at first rejected. We proposed it because we felt that if these schools were going to work, they were going to need the buy-in and commitment on the part of the staff to align teaching with the goals, mission, and educational philosophy of the school.

We tried to get this done through the contract-negotiation process, but the school system would not agree. So we got something into the contract several years ago which said that we would have a joint committee to work on this. In the meantime, this first round of schools was starting and there was no way that we could go the traditional route. So we negotiated outside of the scheduled collective bargaining process. We negotiated two processes. One was for initially staffing the new schools. We had a joint agreement which said that as the school was opening, there would be a selection process that included representatives of the UFT, the school system, the outside partner (whether it was a community-based organization or a college), and, when applicable, the sponsoring organization. That process for selecting teachers for the new schools was something that had never existed in New York City before.

That was not too difficult to get done. The more difficult process was after year one. That was the big change in the traditional staffing and transfer policy. Basically, we codified something that the UFT really took a chance on years ago with International High School: a school staffing policy where a personnel committee would interview and select the teachers who would be coming into that school. The basis of it was that educational background and qualifications were paramount, and that in a case where you have two people of equal qualifications, then the more senior of the two would get the position. But seniority was not the driving force. You could have, for example, a less-experienced teacher get a job in one of these schools over a 20-year veteran if that newer teacher had the better educational qualifications.

This was very tough within the union because there were a lot of people who looked at it as the union selling out: "Hey, you're giving away our rights." But because of the earlier success of having brought our people in from the beginning—not doing it exclusive of them, but with them—this was not brand new. Many of the biggest detractors at the beginning, who had gone through this with some of the schools and seen that the schools had really turned into something promising, became the biggest advocates for this new staffing plan. It is that kind of institutional and *cultural* change that, to me, is the biggest accomplishment here within the union.

What then happened is that we did finally negotiate a formal agreement on this with the school system. The school board had to vote on it, just as we had to have a ratification from our members. We got the ratification overwhelmingly—almost 98 percent. It was done at our delegate assembly, which is the union's highest governance body—representatives from every school. The school system gave us heartache for months. They raised every problem. Finally though, through a lot of unnecessary effort, they did approve it. It is now part of the contract. We've now had two years of it and we haven't had major problems. We have always protected people's rights—they do have an opportunity to challenge a decision. It's worked beautifully.

It seems to me teachers have taken on and expanded leadership roles in these schools that management traditionally thought were "theirs."

What you have in the schools that are most effective is leadership at all levels. It's not just the principal or teacher-director who makes it. Every teacher in these schools must become a leader in some way. They are all given roles and responsibilities, and they agree to this when they go into the school—that they will be on one or more of the different governing committees, whether it's a personnel committee or a curriculum committee, or be responsible for an extracurricular activity. And it's not only the teachers. There is a tremendous amount of student leadership in these schools. You can talk to a student as well as you could talk to a teacher if you want to know what's going on in these schools. They are involved. It's leadership at every level that is making the difference.

One of the things about the small schools is that at one level they sound like magic, and yet what you're really saying is that it's all the toil of everything involved in creating a new organization. You have seen it as a consistent tension to have the union be in a leadership position around educational issues. It sounds like every time you do it, you're buying grief. That's a high risk—so why do it?

Why? Because we have to do it. If we don't do it, we don't know who else out there is going to. The bottom line is that we must have high-quality public schools for our kids. I believe this with every cell in my body. If we do not do this, then I don't believe that we are doing what we are here to do, which is not only to represent teachers in terms of traditional worker rights. A teachers' union is different from other unions, or it should be, and it has to be both a representative and supporter of its members and an advocate for quality education and for improving kids lives. We have to be part of making the product better for the consumer. Our consumers are students and parents, and the product is education. We have no choice but to upgrade the quality of education because everything we are about as a union is also about the quality of what goes on in schools and classrooms. It's tough, but we don't have a choice.

POSTSCRIPT

In June 1996, eight months after this interview took place, a new UFT-Board of Education contract was ratified. It begins with the following preamble:

Joint Intentions and Commitments

Enhanced student achievement based upon high standards and expectations must be the driving force behind every activity of New York City public schools. To accomplish this, we must reinvent schools so that decision making is shared by those closest to students, including parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Layers of bureaucratic impediments must be peeled away so that flexibility, creativity, entrepreneurship, trust, and risk taking become the new reality of our schools. Before the millennium, the factory model schools of the 1900s must make way for the child-centered schools of the next century.

To this end, the Union and the Board mutually agree to join together with other partners in the redesign and improvement of our schools, including closing those that have failed and supporting their restructuring. We must challenge ourselves each day to improve student learning, based upon academic rigor, new-found flexibility, meaningful assessments, and true accountability. Roles and responsibilities of parents, staff, and other partners must be defined. The standards to which we hold our students must never be lower than those we hold for our own children. To accomplish this, we must focus on both the depth and breadth of each proposed instructional and operational change, each designed to support the children and their teachers, whom we expect to meet these rigorous standards.

Change must be service-oriented, supportive, and sufficiently flexible so that each school's educational vision can become a reality. It must be practical, possible, efficient, and timely. Respect for each other and for every student must be unconditional if we are to accomplish what we must.

chapter

Urban Dreamcatchers: Planning and Launching New Small Schools

by Jacqueline Ancess

In response to the debacle of urban school failures, newly woven dreamcatchers are appearing in several cities across the nation as diverse stakeholders in public education come together in a broad effort to create new, small schools.

The Ojibway People, a Native American tribe of the Great Lakes, wove webs called dreamcatchers to protect their infants from harm. They hung these dreamcatchers over the infant's cradle to ensnare bad dreams but let through good ones, which were believed to be the source of wisdom and possibility (Osofsky, 1992). As the dreamcatchers safeguarding the promise and possibilities of the American Dream, public schools, especially those in urban areas, have come under increasing attack. Tangled in their own net, they have become notable for their high rates of violence and low rates of graduation, and they have contributed to a crisis in the nation's confidence in public education. The bad dreams have found their way through the safety net, leaving our youngsters in harm's way.

In response to the debacle of urban school failures, newly woven dreamcatchers are appearing in several cities across the nation as diverse stakeholders in public education come together in a broad effort to create new, small schools. By being small, these schools hope to produce the humane environment that has eluded their larger counterparts. The schools' founders hope that small size will enable them to get to know their students well. As Deborah Meier has pointed out, "Adults work better and students learn better when they know one another."

However, if these new schools are only small and humane, that will not be enough. If the opportunity to develop close relationships with students and know them well is not leveraged on behalf of improving opportunities for their intellectual development, achievement, and success, the promise of these new, small schools will be squandered. The choices they provide must be better than schools that treat and educate students badly and schools that treat students well but don't educate them adequately. These new schools must embrace a bolder and more ambitious dream: they must strive for excellence and equity. Using a strategy of small size, they must aim to become humane learning communities. Teachers use relationships to deepen their knowledge of students in order to engage all of their students in an intellectually challenging education based on powerful ideas, to help them toward social maturity, and to prepare them for a life of meaningful possibilities and active participation in American democracy.

What does it take to successfully launch this new breed of school? What do such schools need to survive? What are reasonable short-term expectations for them? What kind of leadership best supports their development and success? Over the last 20 years, creators of small, innovative schools have sought answers to these questions as they struggled to nurture their schools from infancy into maturity.

These individuals have hewed their own paths, as must the latest group of dreamcatchers who have embarked on more recent journeys.

Five elements help in launching a school:

- a vision;
- the organizational structures and the perseverance to implement the vision;
- a committed constituency of staff, students, and parents;
- a sophisticated understanding of the local education bureaucracy and the know-how to negotiate it; and
- financial resources and support that, depending on the level and immediate ambition of the school, can range from $50,000 to $150,000, exclusive of salaries.

Leadership, which is discussed elsewhere in this volume, must also be acknowledged as a critical variable in the successful launching of a new school.

This chapter shares lessons from the past and offers strategies to guide school creation and development in order to support those who are launching and nurturing new small schools. The appendix includes a planning framework that has been used by several small school founders (all of the small schools discussed in this chapter are in New York City).

CREATING THE VISION

Much has been made about *the vision thing* and for good reason. Launching a school is a statement of belief in the possibilities of education—the belief that education can make a difference in the lives of individuals and in the life of our democracy. The vision is a statement that embodies the school's beliefs about teaching and learning and how they occur. The vision is the architecture of ideas that guides the design and development of the school. It articulates what the school values and believes is important. It states how those values and beliefs will be enacted. It communicates the expectations for the school to members of the school community and to the outside world. The vision tells parents and students what they will be getting and where they will be going when students attend the school. Consider the vision of Urban Academy:

> [The Urban Academy] is a people-centered educational community [in which students] seek understanding in the same way as inquiring minds have done over the centuries. They ask questions and examine the variety of ways they can be answered. . . The Urban Academy is committed to help students become good citizens who value civil debate and can and will engage in making informed choices for our nation (*The Urban Academy*, 1991).

When the turbulence inherent in school development erupts, the vision anchors the school community, enabling it to stay its course. In times of conflict, the staff turns to the vision for direction. It frames discussions on the business of school-keeping and is the foundation on which members of the school community construct common ground and school

For too long, sameness masqueraded as equality for students, and "special" meant "elite." In fact, when unmasked, bureaucratic uniformity has often provided too many students with equal access to poor-quality education and protected the moribund schools that deliver it with a cloak of invisibility.

culture. At International High School, humanities teacher Dina Heisler explains that "the curriculum flows out of our vision." In order to be true to their mission, International's faculty assess their policies and practices against the set of beliefs expressed in the school vision. The vision guides faculty to develop images of practice that embody and become emblematic of it.

Some schools build their vision around a theme, such as community service or environmental studies. Other schools build their vision around principles of education, such as those defined by the Coalition of Essential Schools, or principles of educators like Maria Montessori. Other schools draw from diverse sources to construct their vision. The basis of the vision is not as important as its capacity to coalesce the members of the school community so that they work coherently and collaboratively on behalf of the students toward the achievement of agreed upon goals.

As long as the school exists, the school community needs to regularly revisit the vision in order to assess and renew their common understanding of it, their commitment to it, and their effectiveness in achieving it. Questions that can help schools as they revisit their vision include:

- What is our definition of an educated person?
- What do we want our students to know, have achieved, and be able to do by the time they graduate?
- How are we going to get them there?
- What and where is the correspondence between our vision of an educated person, our vision of a graduate, and our practices? What changes do we have to make to achieve a closer correspondence?

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

Creating the vision—imagining the school of one's dreams—is easy. On the landscape of the imagination, where all is possible, obstacles dissolve. Problem-free schools with unlimited resources reside comfortably in a cocooned universe where everyone and everything cascades into place through a flawless flow of logic that is unimpeded by the constraints, contradictions, and unpredictability of the real world. So compelling is the power of an imagined school—the vision of a better set of possibilities for our children—that many individuals come to believe that anyone can start a school and that starting a school is a rather easy enterprise. When reality intrudes, however, the complexity and difficulty of implementing a vision—of launching a real rather than virtual school—become apparent. School founders learn quickly that implementing the vision is hard and that implementing it well is even harder. Attention to the following can help a new small school survive its founding years:

- Designing an implementation plan.
- Starting small.
- Growing slowly while pushing the boundaries.
- Focusing on community, credibility, culture, concreteness, and celebration.

These strategies will be discussed in the following sections.

DESIGNING AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Implementing a school involves a dialectic between intention and discovery. By intention, I mean the implementation of what has been preplanned and consciously intended—for example, the course

offerings and curriculum, the schedule, the student class assignments, advisories, administrative procedures, and mechanisms for professional development. These constitute a skeletal structure for safety, stability, order, and teaching and learning.

By discovery, I mean those opportunities through which the school community uncovers and pursues unanticipated directions for school and student development. For example, in an effort to assess the depth of their students' understanding, teachers in one of the clusters at International High School asked one group to develop an instructional activity that would demonstrate the application of the scientific principles they were studying. So successful was this exercise that they began to regularly offer it to others. These opportunities emerge only over the course of implementing the vision. An implementation plan that stabilizes a new school can free the faculty to be responsive to discovery because stability provides time and emotional space for reflection and risk taking.

When staff use the implementation plan as a guide rather than as dogma, they are more likely to be in touch with and responsive to the school's developmental needs. Mistakes can become opportunities for collaborative self-correction and redirection rather than cause for panic. Everyone can increase his or her stake in the school's successful unfolding. It is important to remember to use the implementation plan as a tool—although a very important one—for developing the school rather than use the school as a tool for implementing the plan.

A useful plan for implementing a school needs to include a vision statement and a description of the following components:

- The proposed student population and the recruitment process;
- The projected school organization when it is complete;
- Administrative procedures;
- The instructional program;
- Student and school assessment plans;
- Staffing categories, roles, levels of experience, and hiring procedures;
- The governance structure;
- Mechanisms for professional development;
- A plan for parent involvement; and
- Mechanisms for internal and external communication.

The plan also needs to include methods for assessing how well the strategies for implementing the vision are working; a student program for the first term; sample student and teacher schedules for one week; a budget for the first year; space needs for the first year and a projection for the complete school; and a detailed plan for the first day, first week, and first term.

STARTING SMALL

It's smart to start small. Starting small affords school founders the advantage of paying careful attention to setting a strong foundation for school and professional development. Starting small enables staff to get to know one another well around the issues of teaching a group of students that is small enough for all of them to know well. It can be easier for a small group of people to talk to one another frequently and informally as issues and problems arise. This informal talk, along with formal conversations, can build common ground for the community to grow on. Faculty members learn what and how the others think in the context of real-life rather than imagined dilemmas. They can learn how to struggle with closing the inevitable gaps between their beliefs, rhetoric, and practice.

Although staff members may use a common language and subscribe to a common set of beliefs about teaching and learning, they do not know the degree to which their rhetoric reflects a shared understanding until they put their beliefs into practice. It is not uncommon for individuals to think they are in agreement because they use the same language but find they mean different things when they implement their ideas. Rather than cause for alarm, these inevitable disparities provide a forum for discourse that can challenge staff members to sharpen their meanings and construct their common ground. This discourse can be the substance for building the intellectual culture of the school, for developing a shared understanding of standards of professional practice and student achievement, and for defining the boundaries on tolerating differences. Starting these conversations early in the life of the school establishes a tradition of discourse, reflection, and professional development that can keep the school "responsive and responsible" and anchored in its vision (Darling-Hammond, Snyder, et al., 1993). As more faculty join the school staff, these early professional development traditions socialize them into the school culture and, at the same time, strengthen it.

GROWING SLOWLY WHILE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

New schools tend to develop unevenly, and they develop in substance and sophistication only over time. The rhythm of growth is often fits and starts, until enough time has passed so that the school learns how it grows. Much like tending to a newborn baby, growing a new school requires feeding on demand and watching to learn how to respond to its needs and guide its growth. Such tending can help a new school develop momentum and a life of its own. This usually occurs only after two graduating classes, when the school has proof of its capacity for survival, and has a history, traditions, rituals, and a culture that tell community members who they are and how business—from admission to graduation is—done.

The task of starting a school, under any conditions, is overwhelming. The members of the school community need to respect their own limits and strengths. But they also need to push themselves to their limits in order to move ahead and fuel the momentum of new school-building. The tension of growing slowly and pushing the boundaries can help a school develop thoughtfully while expanding its potential to become more than anyone might have imagined. Attention to three major directions of growth can help schools survive and develop: growing up, growing deep slowly, and growing special.

1. Growing Up

Many schools begin with one grade and grow up one grade a year. Growing up sequentially is the least taxing expansion plan for a school. It provides a school with greater control, especially over its development of a coherent intellectual culture that builds new experiences on the learnings of past ones. The staff can assess the effectiveness of the instructional program by assessing the progress and achievement of students over time against the school's agreed-upon goals.

It is useful to keep in mind that the process of growing up wears on the first class of parents and students who, each year, are the test case for the school's program. However, when parents are satisfied with the quality of their children's experience, that tension can be offset by the excitement of pioneering in the invention and creation of the school.

However, a school can start at almost any one or several grades and grow up and down simultaneously. Olivia Lynch, for example, began the Partnership School with 3rd and 4th grades because there was a critical need to serve those students. The school then grew up and down each subsequent year until it was a kindergarten-6th grade school. But starting with multiple grades and growing up and down simultaneously intensifies a school's challenge to achieve organizational, curricular, and staffing coherence.

Elementary schools sometimes begin with grades kindergarten and 1st grade. Some middle schools begin with 6th and 7th grades. Often, schools begin with multiple grades in order to enroll enough students to be able to hire enough teachers to ensure integrity and variety in the instructional program. Sometimes they begin with multiple grades because they are committed to multiage grouping.

2. Growing Deep Slowly

A school community with an ambitious vision will not achieve it on the first day or in the first year. The depth and sophistication required to achieve the vision will occur only over time. The innovative visions undergirding many new schools require teachers to adapt to new practices with which they and their students may have varying degrees of experience. These new practices—whether interdisciplinary curriculum, block scheduling, advisories, or authentic assessments—are neither magical nor virtues in themselves. When used appropriately and effectively, they can powerfully access learning. But when they mistakenly are transformed from strategies into goals, the reform can become procedural rather than substantive. People can become more concerned about the tools of reform—for example, doing portfolios—than the reform's effect on the quality of students' intellectual development. New practices are often complex and subtly nuanced. They require teaching skills more akin to jazz improvisation than practicing scales. Expertise requires time, support, revision, and perseverance, especially if the school intends to ensure equal learning opportunities for diverse learners.

Growing deep slowly can support the development of an inquiry-based and reflective school culture in which the school community continuously assesses teaching, learning, and student progress and achievement. A reflective school culture can encourage teachers to thoughtfully introduce new practices so that they can be implemented effectively enough not to compromise the quality of students' education. International High School, for example, took several years to develop and implement a schoolwide authentic

assessment system in order to ensure that the practices embodied their concerns about student learning.

Growing deep slowly can permit teachers and students to be socialized—and in many cases resocialized—into the constellation of new expectations undergirding new schools. If students have developed strategies for coping with impersonal and unresponsive schools, when they attend one that aims to be personal and responsive, they need instruction to learn new strategies and time to learn to trust. A strategy of advisories designed to encourage a personal and responsive education may require specific activities so that students can use the advisory for those purposes. Project learning may require teachers to provide varying degrees of mediation and coaching if diverse students are to have access to success. The understanding that innovative practice requires resocialization and needs to be connected to student learning may lead a school community to adopt reforms more slowly than it had originally imagined.

3. Growing Special

Being special is the fun of new school development. Being special has enabled new school starters to break from the deadening uniformity and anonymity of bureaucracy and invigorate the process of schooling. For too long, sameness masqueraded as equality for students, and "special" meant "elite." In fact, when unmasked, bureaucratic uniformity has often provided too many students with equal access to poor-quality education and protected the moribund schools that deliver it with a cloak of invisibility. Being special can be a way new schools distinguish themselves and try to provide an education of distinction for their students. It can be a way of saying to the world, "Here I am." It can be how a school becomes visible, knowable, and accountable.

New schools that aim to be special need to identify those features that make them special. By immediately implementing some of the distinctive features that define the school and that demonstrate its vision, school founders can begin to carve out their unique identity. For example, the Community Service Academy in New York City's District 6 immediately instituted community service internships for its students. Middle College High School and LaGuardia Community College initiated their collaboration by making college resources immediately accessible to high school students. The Legacy School culminated its first year with student exhibitions that served as the signature of its instructional program. As these defining activities become rooted in the school's culture, they strengthen its identity by demonstrating "who we are" and "how we are special" to the members of the school community as well as to the outside world.

Growing special pushes a school to its boundaries: the unique events and new rituals and traditions shift the school landscape by demanding time, space, and the disruption of routine. As the school landscape shifts, the school community can learn how to struggle with the tension between its need for routine and predictability and its need for excitement and invigoration. If the school community learns to tolerate and negotiate this struggle, it can sharpen its identity, deepen its culture, and develop its capacity for self-renewal. It can "choose to resist the

New schools can assess their achievement of respect by asking these and similar questions:

- Is student and staff attendance high?
- Is there order?
- Do students feel physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe?
- Do students feel valued by faculty and their peers?
- Do faculty feel valued?
- Do students feel they are learning?
- Are students optimistic about their future?
- Is there a supportive rapport between faculty and students?
- Are parents satisfied with their role?

These questions are important because small schools aim to be communities, not simply efficient institutions that deliver information.

To assess the degree to which the school is building an intellectual community, one might ask:

- What is the evidence that faculty and students explore ideas?
- What is the evidence of student learning and progress?
- Is the foundation for professional development in place?

Finally, to explore the school's commitment to the future, one might look at:

- parental investment in the school;
- faculty and student ownership;
- the presence of rituals and traditions;
- the sense of direction;
- clarity about priorities; and
- a follow-up plan for year two.

thoughtlessness, banality, technical rationality, [and] carelessness . . . that now undermine public education at every turn" (Greene, 1995, p. 2).

FOCUSING ON FIVE KEY FACTORS

Five factors that contribute to the launching of a healthy school include:
(1) community building,
(2) credibility,
(3) culture,
(4) concreteness, and
(5) celebration.
These must all be attended to concurrently from the inception of the school. Their synergy and progress make the school's developmental journey smoother or rougher and affect its chances of achieving excellence.

1. Building Community

Since this new breed of school is built on relationships and trust rather than regulations, building community is the most important and hardest work of a school's first year. At a school's inception, everyone and everything are new. There are no precedents to point the way. There are no mechanisms in place to ensure access to information and effective communication, which are the cornerstones of community-building and community-keeping.

Even when a school begins with parents, students, a staff, and other collaborators who are committed to its vision, these individuals, nonetheless, come to the school with their own understanding of the vision, their own images of how it will be implemented, and their own expectations for outcomes. And they come with an investment in their imagined school. In order for this collection of individuals to transform themselves into a cohesive educational community, they have to begin to come to terms with the disparities between the imagined and the actual enactment of the school. They have to work at building common ground. They must develop mechanisms and processes for effective and timely communication and action. In other words, they have to have regular, formal and informal, opportunities to talk, talk, talk, do, do, do, redo, redo, redo, cry, cry, cry, and laugh, laugh, laugh. Building the internal community helps new schools develop a strong inner core. Building an extended community and networking with like-minded schools provide external support. All three activities increase schools' chances of survival.

Building the internal community:
Although the demands and excitement of beginning a new school may seem like sufficient impetus to consolidate the energy of students, staff, and parents, the conditions for community-building must be deliberately established if the school is going to become a community. Opportunities need to be structured for students, staff, and parents to make attachments to one another and for the faculty to develop a professional community so that the school can become a cohesive, caring educational community.

Since students need and want to develop close relationships with adults and peers in their school, opportunities for them to have easy access to teachers and for them to socialize increase the possibility that those relationships will occur. Access to teachers can be made through low student/teacher ratios, as suggested in the

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principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools; through advisories and tutorials; and through shared student and teacher space, as practiced by the Urban Academy. More than anything, students need to make friends and to find a place for themselves where they are accepted and valued and where they can find comfort. Opportunities for students to interact in intellectual, social, and extracurricular contexts help them make friends, socialize each other to the culture of the school, build school spirit, and create a sense of family. Teenage students, especially, can enjoy experiencing the kinds of traditions experienced by older siblings or popularized in the media: sports teams, proms, seasonal social events, sociopolitical activism, and even weekly spelling tests. A new school offers students the excitement of initiating traditions and rituals and establishing a legacy for those who will follow.

Parents have the exciting challenge of establishing the parents' association, writing its constitution, creating its committees, and cutting the path for parent involvement in the school. They set the precedent for parents' roles in school decision-making. The integral involvement of parents in the formation of a new school can have a powerful impact on parents personally and on conditions at the school. In the first year of Manhattan East, when the district office was slow to repair the school's leaking roof and crumbling plaster walls, the vigilant parents met regularly with the superintendent and got the job done quickly. Fifteen years after Manhattan East began, the "pioneer parents," as they called themselves, still comment on how "starting a school was one of the highlights of our" lives."

The first faculty has the challenge of developing the foundation for a professional community as they get to know each other, learn to get along with each other, and develop strategies to tolerate each other's differences. Even people who have worked together previously or been friends may have to reconfigure their relationship so that it is appropriate to the demands of the new school. Staff are challenged to develop an allegiance to an unfolding and unproven organization. Often, they must relinquish the habits of their former school cultures and learn new ones at the same time that they, themselves, are creating those new norms. As the school's identity is clarified and staff seek a closer fit with the school's enacted vision, some individuals remain while others leave.

Structures and traditions for professional development establish the foundation for a professional community that has the capacity to work cohesively on behalf of the intellectual and social development of students. From the beginning, time must be set aside for faculty to meet regularly, converse about students, and inquire, problem-solve, learn, and grow their pedagogy thoughtfully and critically. If there is smart staffing, where a core of experienced teachers can mentor and socialize new or inexperienced teachers, a school can conduct much of its own professional development, reinforcing interdependency and staff expertise.

Building the extended community: Building an extended community means making connections and developing relationships with other stakeholders in public education. Neighborhood organizations, businesses, social agencies, local colleges and universities, and the central/district office are among those that constitute the extended community. When the new school reaches out to establish relationships and forge alliances, it can generate good will, confidence, and local support, all of which contribute to its development.

Building an alliance with the central office can be very important, especially since the office controls information and access to resources. New school founders who develop a sophisticated understanding of their central office bureaucracy and learn how business gets done, who is who, and how to negotiate, put their school at a clear advantage. The skill of working the bureaucracy is especially important for dealing with the regulations that bureaucracies are charged with enforcing. Although the common wisdom that it is better to apologize than to ask for permis-

sion holds, it is also important to learn how to interpret regulations to the advantage of the school and make them work for you. Since bureaucracies are not monolithic, there are always bureaucrats who will help schools and educators locate resources and interpret regulations that will work on behalf of the schools. These individuals are worth seeking out and befriending. By considering the central office to be a member of the extended school community, school founders can build the political and social capital necessary to weather the inevitable conflicts and competing priorities that arise between schools and their regulating bureaucracies.

It is also extremely important to have a good working relationship with unions, as well as a sophisticated understanding of the contracts guiding the working conditions of teachers and other members of the school community. The importance of building a cooperative relationship with teachers' unions cannot be overemphasized. In New York City, for example, leaders in the new schools' initiatives and the United Federation of Teachers collaborated to revise teacher hiring and transfer policies so that nontraditional schools could waive seniority rules in order to employ teachers whose pedagogical commitments were compatible with the schools' missions.

Networking: Networks that connect new schools to other like-minded schools mitigate against the pain and vulnerability of isolation inherent in school-starting and school-keeping. There can be both political and educational safety in numbers. Membership in a network can give a school the legitimacy and freedom to pursue an innovative course. It can broaden the new school's learning context by providing it with access to experienced schools as well as to other new schools. Networks, such as the Center for Collaborative Education, New Visions and the Annenberg Project in New York City, the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, and the national Coalition of Essential Schools, offer members of new schools a forum for problem solving, knowledge building, and knowledge sharing, as well as technical assistance and political and financial support, which are all helpful to school development.

2. Establishing Credibility

New schools start on a promise, with everyone—faculty, parents, students, and local stakeholders—wondering whether they will deliver on it. Often silently, new school stakeholders ask: Will the school work? Will it survive? Will it have been a good investment? Will parents want to send their children? Everyone hopes, but no one knows. As the deeds of the school begin to provide answers to these questions, it establishes credibility. When a school delivers on its promises, when it has its first graduating class and everyone involved sees what percent graduate and what graduates have gone on to, a school solidifies its credibility.

Although the percentage of graduates and the list of schools to which graduates are accepted are two of the most powerful credibility tests, earlier indicators begin to develop a school's credibility. These include a safe and orderly environment; accessible, responsive, and caring leaders and teachers; good teaching; delivery on critical aspects of the vision; instruction that is interesting, exciting, and demanding, and that supports students' success; and a steady stream of evidence attesting to student learning, progress, and achievement.

Events such as regular exhibitions of students' work and learning—art shows, written reports, math and science projects, mock trials, videotaped discussions, portfolios of students' work that concretely show their progress over time—can be powerful evidence of growth and delivery on the educational promises of a new school. Delivery on the unique elements of a school is also important. The School for Academic and Athletic Excellence immediately instituted the impressive athletics program it promised, including gymnastics and track and field training. Students at the Museum School began with projects at a variety of museums. Such activities enable the watching world to say about the school: "They said they would and they did."

School-to-parent communication is another activity that builds credibility. Some schools send parents packets that include the mission statement, the curriculum framework, descriptions of courses, and expectations for student performance. Some schools host a curriculum night during which parents go to their child's classroom to see their child's teacher present the curriculum. During the presentation, parents have an opportunity to ask questions and engage the teacher in discussion. For credibility to develop, the flow of school-to-parent communication needs to be sustained. Some schools send parents regular (weekly or monthly) newsletters informing them of students' activities, class projects, schoolwide achievements, and upcoming events. Some communiques include samples of student work, such as poetry, or individual student accounts of trips. Some schools

send the student newspaper to parents. The more that communication publicly documents the school's activity, the more parents have an account of what is happening—and the more they are able to assess how the school is delivering on its promises. As school credibility develops, parent confidence builds, and the school begins to develop a reputation and a following. In such a fashion, it can become worthy of public trust.

All of these activities develop internal as well as external credibility and, thus, strengthen the school as a community. Faculty and students become confident in one another, in their judgements, and in the capacity of their policies and practices to achieve the school's goals. They begin to feel that the school is good and that they are good. Opportunities and processes for rigorous school self-review, in which the school community can assess its progress and achievement and self-correct, help sustain internal credibility.

3. Building the Culture

As a school community articulates and implements the values and assumptions embedded in its vision, its culture begins to take shape. Members of the school community learn what those values mean by the ways in which they are enacted in the school. For example, if a school community values caring, it learns what that means by examining what its members imagine caring to look like, what evidence there is of these or other images of caring in the school, how the school is organized to be a caring community, and what mechanisms exist that provide opportunities for caring. Similarly, if a school community values equity and intellectual development, how those values are put into operation demonstrates what the school means by them. This argues for mechanisms that enable the school community to reflect critically on how closely the school implements its values.

The school culture lets the members of the school community know what is normative—"how we do and do not do business here," what is acceptable and what is not. At the Urban Academy, students quickly learn the "no personal attacks" rule, meaning that individuals are free to attack one another's ideas, but not one another. Students and staff are highly attuned to the differences between the two and quick to take action when transgressions occur. An understanding of how business is conducted reinforces the school's identity. At the Urban Academy, the enforcement of the "no personal attacks" rule reaffirms the school's identity as a community committed to intellectual inquiry.

Traditions, rituals, consistent norms, and the allocation of resources in support of what the school community values, help build and reinforce a school culture that embodies its vision. The culture is more likely to reflect the vision when the school community has opportunities to develop a shared understanding of the school values and a range of practices that reflect and implement them.

4. Getting Concrete

Getting concrete means attending to details. It means setting clear expectations for all members of the school community. In fact, tenacious attention to details, insistence on clarity, and the struggle for precision distinguish the desultory from the expert execution of new schools. Teachers at Manhattan East, for example,

School's Credibility: Early Indicators

A safe and orderly environment;
Accessible, responsive, and caring leader;
Good teaching;
Delivery on critical aspects of the vision;
Instruction that is interesting, exciting, and demanding and that supports students' success;
A steady stream of evidence attesting to student learning, progress, and achievement; and
School-to-parent communication

needed to clearly understand and agree that each would have to assume administrative responsibilities because the school had a limited budget for administration and because it was to be a teacher-run school. They had to develop curriculum to implement the school's commitment to arts and academics through a program of elective courses. They had to decide on how to assign required courses and electives to ensure equal access to knowledge and opportunities to learn.

Attending to details is grueling, focused work devoid of the glamour that draws many into founding schools. But clear, concrete, and detailed underpinnings and procedures are behind every powerful idea that schools faithfully implement. These develop over time through trial, error, self-scrutiny, and relentless revision. Careful attention to fine-tuning the details of school organization, pedagogy, and student performance help the school community increase and sustain high expectations for faculty and student achievement.

Detailed underpinnings and procedures are present in every smoothly operating school and need to be a top priority if new schools are to immediately establish safety and order so that education can assume its rightful priority. When the school has sensible administrative policies and procedures on issues such as school starting and dismissal times, rules of behavior, absence and lateness, dress codes, security, health, and family-contact instructions—and when they are clearly articulated, understood, and consistently executed—faculty, students, and parents can feel confidence in the safe, orderly operation of their school.

Rather than inventing administrative procedures from scratch, as Cecilia Cunningham (principal of Middle College High School and sponsor of the new Robert Wagner, Jr., High School for Arts and Technology) points out, new school communities can adapt the administrative procedures from experienced, like-minded schools. As the new school develops, the staff will need to revisit and revise these practices.

5. Celebrating

Despite the pain and hard work, launching a new school is a celebratory event, not only because it is new, but because the act of creating it reaffirms the promise of education as the gateway to "the good life and the good society" for all (Gutmann, 1987, p. 14). The opportunity for closeness, attachment, and community-creation, and the challenge of embarking on a new beginning, a new set of possibilities inherent in founding new, small schools, merit special recognition. Celebratory activities in which school stakeholders formally recognize their survival and display their accomplishments inspire optimism, validate our faith in human possibility, support the school's spiritual development, and deepen the bonds of the school community.

Through the creation of meaningful rituals and traditions that give voice to all individuals and to the community by acknowledging individual and collective achievements, triumphs, trials, and disappointments, new schools can develop and celebrate their spiritual core. At Manhattan East, parents, students, and staff celebrated their commitment to each other, solidified the bonds of community, and affirmed themselves through traditions such as the Family Dinner and Talent Show, the Renaissance Fair, the Beatnik Cafe, and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Commemoration. At these family events, students exhibited their work and achievements for the entire community. The Urban Academy reaffirms itself as a community at celebrations such as the communal Thanksgiving dinner and presentations that recognize students' achievements, where students report on their college courses, present their projects, and perform Shakespearean monologues and chamber music.

EARLY EXPECTATIONS FOR NEW SCHOOLS

Sometimes new schools are subjected to a level of scrutiny not applied to established schools that have a long history of failure. Where often the response to these established schools is to revitalize them by pouring in money and new program packages, there is sometimes talk about closing new schools that are struggling to stand up. As new schools struggle to find themselves and survive, education officials need to understand that setbacks are inevitable, especially when ambitious reform is instituted by an idealistic but insufficiently skilled staff. Turbulence is predictable. Staff may regress to practices they disavowed until they learn how to implement the practices they believe in. Staff and students may leave. Although such setbacks are discouraging, they can be used to unify and strengthen the school community around collective problem solving and professional development. It is worth noting that Central Park East Secondary School lost nearly half of its staff during its first year, yet transcended its initial difficulties to receive national acclaim.

We need to look at new schools from the perspective of how what is going on in the school's present is moving toward the realization of its vision. Observers, be they visitors or evaluators, need to see how the present condition of the school connects to its vision for itself. Sometimes those connections are readily apparent. At other times, the connections become apparent through conversations with the staff, students, and parents, and through an assessment of students' progress. In assessing new schools, observers need to resist comparisons with an idealized fantasy of a perfect school or with schools that have established track records of astounding success, especially when the new schools are taking risks to respond where other schools have failed. If comparisons must be made, they should be made within the reality of the kind of education the students would be receiving elsewhere, were it not for the new school.

Although looking too closely too soon can undermine new schools—which develop capacity, complexity, and sophistication in layers that accumulate over time—no school is ever unaccountable for basic achievements, even in its first year. These achievements include building the foundation for respect, an intellectual community, and a commitment to the future.

New schools can assess their achievement of respect by asking these and similar questions: Is student and staff attendance high? Is there order? Do students feel physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe? Do students feel valued by faculty and their peers? Do faculty feel valued? Do students feel they are learning? Are students optimistic about their future? Is there a supportive rapport between faculty and students? Are parents satisfied with their role? These questions are important because small schools aim to be communities, not simply efficient institutions that deliver information.

To assess the degree to which the school is building an intellectual community, one might ask: What is the evidence that faculty and students explore ideas? What is the evidence of student learning and progress? Is the foundation for professional development in place? Finally, to explore the school's commitment to the future, one might look at parental investment in the school, faculty and student ownership, the presence of rituals and traditions, the sense of direction, clarity about priorities, and a follow-up plan for year two.

As new schools assess themselves in these areas, it is realistic to expect their achievement to be uneven. They will have work to do because starting a school is a formidable endeavor. And starting a good school—one with the capacity to provide excellence and equity, one in which the educational and social experiences enable students to re-imagine themselves and their possibilities—is even more difficult and rare. The creation of schools as educational communities that consciously intend to provide all students with the kind of rigorous, intellectually challenging education that used to be restricted to an elite is no mere downsizing of big bad institutions. It is a radical notion and an even more radical endeavor. No blueprints for it exist—they are being created and recreated by the current crop of new school starters whose work across the country is attempting to chart a new course despite the myriad of obstacles. But what other alternatives are there for public education? And what other dream-catchers? And what other dreams?

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Appendix

Planning Guide for Launching a New School

Where often the response to these established schools is to revitalize them by pouring in money and new program packages, there is sometimes talk about closing new schools that are struggling to stand up. As new schools struggle to find themselves and survive, education officials need to understand that setbacks are inevitable.

This planning guide was developed from my experiences as the founding director of Manhattan East Junior High School, as director of alternative schools and educational options in Districts 2 and 3 in New York City, and from work supporting secondary school restructuring in New York City and State.

The set of questions and tasks, while by no means exhaustive, is meant to guide educators in restructuring and designing new schools. The tasks focus on major issues for launching a small school in an urban bureaucracy. Some tasks are simple and are undertaken prior to the opening of the school. Others will need regular revisiting over the life of the school.

Some of the tasks confront school founders with what appear to be obstacles. Treat obstacles as opportunities for playing with the confounding constraints that are inherent in school-starting and school-keeping. Such play helps school founders develop the creativity and strategies that are invaluable for school founding and development. Working with constraints can build tenacity and a deeper understanding of the nuances required for making good small schools in the rough and tumble world of public education.

1. Describe the vision/concept for the school. To help define that vision, ask yourself questions such as these: What is our definition of an educated person? What do we want our students to know, have achieved, and be able to do by the time they graduate?

2. What ages/grades will the school encompass? What is the growth plan—how many students in how many grades will be admitted over what period of time?

3. Describe the population the school intends to serve. How will the school identify potential students? Describe the student recruitment plan. What are the provisions to ensure equity?

4. Describe the organizational structure envisioned for the school—student grouping, class/grade organization, length of school day, periods, etc.

5. Outline the administrative procedures.

6. Describe the instructional component—subjects, courses, pedagogical commitments, etc. What will students learn? How will they learn it? Write out the student program for the first term—what subjects/courses students will take, how many periods/times a week. Describe any relationships with external organizations.

7. Describe the assessment practices the school will use. How will the school assess both student and school progress and achievement?

8. List the categories of staffing needed to implement the program for the first year (for example, a half-time music teacher, a physics/math teacher, an environmental scientist). What will the process be for hiring teachers? Will teachers be expected to take on nontraditional roles (for example, will all teachers be expected to lead advisories)? If so, what will these roles be? How does the teachers' contract affect the school's plans for teachers' roles and responsibilities? What professional development will be provided so that teachers are prepared for these roles?

9. Describe the governance structure. Describe the role and function of leadership. How will decisions be made? Who will be entitled to participate in making what decisions?

10. Describe mechanisms for professional development—for example, grade-level meetings, departmental meetings, teacher study groups; teacher support, review, and evaluation processes; team planning time, etc.

11. Describe the parent-involvement component.

12. Describe internal and external communication mechanisms (regular meetings, newsletters). How often and in what format(s) will the school report on student progress and achievement to parents?

13. Write out a sample student program for a week.

14. Write out a sample teacher program for a week.

15. How well are your strategies likely to get you to your goals?

a. Match your responses to items 4, 6, and 7 against your response to item 1. In what ways does there seem to be a match? A mismatch? Does it seem like your organizational structure, your instructional component, and your assessment practices will get you to the outcomes you have stated in item 1? How do you know? What's the logic?

b. Match item 13 against items 1, 4, 6, and 7. Are students getting what you want them to?

c. Match item 14 against items 1, 4, 6, 7, and 8. Do your staffing categories enable you to achieve what you intend? Are teachers' working conditions reasonable?

d. What and where is the correspondence between your vision of an educated person, your vision of a graduate, and your practices? What changes do you have to make to achieve a closer correspondence?

16. Draw up a year-one budget for the following categories:

- furniture
- equipment (including computers and media)
- books
- instructional materials
- experiences (including trips, professional development, collaborations with community-based organizations)
- supplies (instructional and administrative).

17. List your space needs for the first year (number of classrooms, number of specialty rooms—for example, art and gym—to be used how many periods a week).

18. Before opening, design a concrete plan for the first day, the first week, and the first term. How does it implement the school vision?

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section

A Range of Perspectives

"It's harder [small schools] because the teachers care about us and they have such high expectations of us. So we have to meet those expectations and live up to them."

Small Schools:

Spaces for Moral Outrage and Education for Social Justice

Teaching for Social Justice[1]

Maxine Greene

Maxine Greene is a brilliant philosopher at Teachers College, Columbia University, a passionate advocate for school reform, a woman of boundless energy and ideas. Moving gracefully across the intellectual and political fields of aesthetics, education, existentialism and activism, she confronts questions of social injustice, social imagination and, of course, schools. In the following essay Greene dances with the words of Karl Marx, Frederick Douglas and Marge Piercy, asking always, how can we produce public schools in which young people engage their moral outrage and still imagine a world "not yet?" Maxine provokes, discomforts and yet assures us that small schools play a significant role in producing, with youth, a public pedagogy for social justice.

At that point, there may be a coming together to invent the kind of dialogue that will explore the meanings of social justice and, at once, lead to transformation of a particular corner of the world. We need to wonder whether this demands the creation of situations—small schools, perhaps?—in which young people, now aware of suffering and unfairness, can gather together in the name of justice to heal somehow, to remedy, to repair.

The voices of indignation and protest have resounded through the years in response to injustices and human suffering. Think of William Blake, finding his metaphor in the image of a naked child thrust down a chimney:

> When my mother died I was very young,
> and my father sold me while yet my tongue
> could scarcely cry "weep!" "weep!" "weep!"
> So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep. (Blake, 1967, p. 21)

Think of Karl Marx, in the midst of a theoretical discussion of capitalist production, describing a nine-year-old boy who was seven when he began working in a pottery, 'running moulds.' "He came to work every day in the week at 6 a.m. and left off about 9 p.m. 'I work till 9 o'clock at night six nights in the week.' Fifteen hours of labor for a child of seven years old!" (Marx, 1906, p. 269). Then Marx goes on to talk about the high death rate from pulmonary disease among the potters, and how each generation is more dwarfed than the preceding. After a piling up of details about suffering and degeneration, he calls for the setting up of

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[1] This is an abstract from a larger essay in *Teaching for Social Justice: A Democracy and Education Reader* (edited by William Ayers, Jean Ann Hunt, and Therese Quinn. The New Press and Teachers College Press, 1998).

a social barrier that "shall prevent the very workers from selling, by voluntary contract with capital, themselves and their families into slavery and death" (Marx, 1906, p. 330). The concreteness of his examples communicates his outrage, as it enables us to "see." And there is Frederick Douglas writing about the ways slaveholders used holidays to keep down the "spirit of insurrection." Giving them free time, they forced alcohol upon them "to disgust slaves with freedom by plunging them into the lowest depths of dissipation. For instance, the slaveholders not only like to see the slave drunk of his own accord . . . but make bets on their slaves, as to who can drink the most whiskey without getting drunk; and, in this way, they succeed in getting whole multitudes to drink to excess . . . So when the holidays ended, we staggered up from the filth of our wallowing, took a long breath, and marched to the field feeling, on the whole, rather glad to go, from what our master had deceived us into a belief was freedom, back to the arms of slavery" (Gates & McKay, 1997, p. 345). And there is Langston Hughes' "Harlem."

> What happens to a dream deferred?
> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?
> Or fester like a sore –
> And then run?
> Does it stink like rotten meat?
> Or crust and sugar over
> like a syrupy sweet?
>
> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load
>
> *Or does it explode?* (Gates & McKay, 1997, p. 1267)

And there is (among countless women) Marge Piercy:

> The weight of the Tower is in me. Can I ever straighten?
> You trained me in passivity to lay for you like a doped hen.
> You bounce your gabble off the sky to pierce our brains.
> Your loudspeakers from every television and classroom
> and your transistors grafted onto my nerves at birth
> shout you are impregnable and righteous forever.
> But any structure can be overthrown. (Piercy, 1994, p. 123)

I could go on, my readers could go on—attesting to the persistence of injustice, unfairness, particular experiences of violation and manipulation and lack of care. To teach for social justice, however, is not only to assemble the particulars,

significant though they are. Yes, they may awaken certain somnolent ones, they may penetrate indifference here and there, they may even stimulate the "sense of injustice" (Cahn, 1949). But they do not, in and of themselves, help people understand what social justice means for everyday collective life. Justice, after all, is thought to be the primary value of political life if it is incarnated in human action in spaces where people can live together. Thinking of it as a normative ideal, a notion of how persons ought to live together, most of us would agree that there should be an equitable, fair distribution of goods and services. Select groups of men and women ought not to thrive at the cost of others' suffering. Surely, people ought not be used for others' benefit, certainly not without being consulted. Indeed, one of the requirements in a just society ought to be that everyone affected by a decision ought to have a part in making the decision.

In a just society, at the very least, every person should have an opportunity to "develop and exercise her or his intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive capacities" (Young, 1993, p. 123). This points directly at a potential role for democratic education in enabling people to pursue social justice. But it also raises questions, nagging questions, about the connection between the satisfaction of basic needs and the free use of opportunities to develop the capacities described.

Teaching for social justice, we must remember, is teaching what we believe ought to be —not merely where moral frameworks are concerned, but in material arrangements for people in all spheres of society. Moreover, teaching for social justice is teaching for the sake of arousing the kinds of vivid, reflective, experiential responses that might move students to come together in serious efforts to understand what social justice actually means and what it might demand. That means teaching to the end of arousing a consciousness of membership, active and participant membership in a society of unfulfilled promises—teaching for what Paulo Freire used to call "conscientization" (Freire, 1970), heightened social consciousness, a wide-awakeness that might make injustice unendurable. We speak often of generating a sense of urgency in young people, and it seems evident that this mode of teaching is at least likely to communicate a sense of agency, if the young can feel themselves engaged for and with those around. Once awakened (as a group, a small community) to concrete examples of injustice (the humiliation of immigrant children, the refusal of decent housing to single mothers or the aged; the deterioration of certain classrooms and not others; the closing of playgrounds in ghetto neighborhoods) they might, together, invent a project of remediation, palliation, and repair.

It cannot be taken for granted that everyone will notice instances of injustice, nor recognize it for what it is. It certainly cannot be assumed, given the pressures and seductions of the media, that young people will resist the temptation of consumerism, competitiveness, fashion, and conventionality. There is the matter of knowing enough (and feeling enough) to argue the cause of injustice and persuade others of the importance of moving beyond self-interest to a consideration of their responsibility as members, as citizens, or (sometimes in the extreme) as a contemporary version of resistance fighters. What can teachers do to empower young people to criticize the emphasis on efficiency and efficacy as primary values—instead of justice and equality? How can teachers open students to the possibility that there may be more fulfillment to be discovered in living in a just society than in an arrantly inequitable one? What can be done to help people to perceive (and take action against) the cruelty and aggressiveness in current challenges to "dependency"? How can they be helped to recognize the violations in the continuing objectification of women and children? What situations can be created that might motivate students to combat the endless process of silencing that structures so many schools, what Michelle Fine calls "the muting of students and their communities" (Fine, 1991, p. 32)?

Schools find it difficult to register the meanings of lived oppression or exclusion or pain. Focusing on curriculum frameworks, on critical questioning, on new approaches to the teaching of reading and science (as surely they must), those who feel themselves responsible for enabling the young to become literate, to understand their worlds, to cope with the complexities of work and citizenship, find themselves retreating from signs of real suffering. It is hard and unbearably frustrating much of the time really to attend to the desolation in some children's faces, the panic inflicted by experiences of homelessness, the incomprehensible horror of a parent's death from AIDS, the terror in the face of "drive-by" killings, the fearful absence when a youngster has taken refuge in drugs.

The specter of social injustice, the ravages of injustice seem to ask too much. It is enough, educators reassure themselves (if they care at all) to work for such humane changes as those Theodore Sizer lists in *Horace's School*, "a site where the resources to help young people use their minds well are deliberately and generously concentrated" (Sizer, 1992, p. 198). There is no question but the use of exhibitions instead of multiple choice tests, an effective and creative use of technology, and a willingness to accept an "educational coat of many colors" (Sizer, 1992, p. 200) may do a great deal to aid the young, at least those fortunate enough to go to schools with sufficient resources, sufficient care and good will. Understandably, this may appear enough to those involved and authentically devoted to the becoming of young people and children in all their promise and diversity. Why, then, teach for social justice?

Teaching for social justice demands, as we have said, openings to all sides: to that of persons desirous of telling their stories or picturing them in some fashion; to that of newcomers striving to make sense of the very notion of consensus or mutuality; to that of children and young people, familiar with the languages used at home (oftentimes, not standard English) or with the languages of the street.

The schools most likely to be hospitable to the conversation relating to social justice (and perhaps to small advances to actual transformations) are some of the latter-day "progressive," small schools that now and then are geared to open possibility (Rose, 1995). They are *small communities of adults and children joined*, most often, *in commitments* geared to "active learning," to young people's authentic questioning, and journal-keeping. They are constructivist, in the sense of encouraging the young to find or construct meanings rather than to go in search of meanings already predefined.

The teachers involved ordinarily reject the old subjectivist approach with their assumption of an objective domain of values "out there." They utilize one or another version of the hermeneutic, or an interpretive approach to past and present histories. Relying on a transactional approach to inquiry, they encourage perspectival knowing, situated approaches to learning—to what is being analyzed and reflected upon and gradually understood. Learners are asked consciously to impose differing orders upon their experiences, orders that defamiliarize (as literary works may do), that clarify, highlight, render problematic. Certain modes of ordering or structuring derive from the disciplines as viewed from the diverse vantage points captured by a given class. There is an acknowledgment of what are called multiple realities, on occasion an affirmation of cultural pluralism.

The education offered in many of the small schools may be argued for in the light of fairness, as well as in the light of efficacy and generosity. At the very least, there are opportunities for the long silenced—*students, parents, and sometimes, teachers*—to be heard, for the invisible to become visible. In contrast to many of the mainstream, *often larger*, schools, they are open to multiplicity and difference. They can afford provocations to individuals to choose themselves. Some explicitly teach for a kind of awakening, for critical consciousness. Now and then we can find a school commit-

ted enough to transform its neighborhood to speak explicitly about social justice. Now and then we can find one working to enable students to overcome what Paulo Freire described as "internalized oppression" (Freire, 1970). That means, of course, to learn to reflect upon experience in the cultural and the social world, to discover how much of the stuff of actually lived experience has been shaped by an oppressor somewhere—a landlord, an inspector, a principal, a physician—and how much has been freely chosen by the individual empowered to create her/himself and how she/he lives a life. There is then the question of finding out how many others recognize and share the same mode of oppression or dehumanization. At that point, there may be a coming together to invent the kind of dialogue that will explore the meanings of social justice and, at once, lead to transformation of a particular corner of the world. We need to wonder whether *this* demands the creation of situations—*small schools, perhaps?*—in which young people, now aware of suffering and unfairness, can gather together in the name of justice to heal somehow, to remedy, to repair.

Students *in such spaces* come to see that each one's status really depends on a just order. It may be an order that extends further and further, from small group to small group, from classroom to kitchen, from kitchen to a back room in a church or a hospital. Extending as it might, more and more persons in their engagements with others may be caught up in the currents of such extension, of the river overflowing its banks and nourishing the land. To teach for social justice is to teach for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise. *It is to be in touch, in the company of known others, to be intimate and engaged.* It is to find models in literature and history of the indigent ones, the ones forever ill at ease, and the loving ones who have taken the side of the victims of pestilences, whatever their names or places of origin. It is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, *schools and beyond*, who have tried to become healers and to change their worlds.

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chapter

Perspectives: Administrators

I want us to be very careful when we talk about small schools—that we don't as educators begin to think of them as a solution for students who are the disenfranchised of America. The principle of small schools, in which teachers and students know each other well, is good for all children.

OLIVIA IFILL-LYNCH

Olivia Ifill-Lynch is teacher-director of the School for Academic and Athletic Excellence, a small middle school that opened in New York City in 1993. The school's students are socio-economically diverse; almost all of them are black or Latino. In this interview conducted by Michelle Fine in May 1996, Ifiill-Lynch talks about her role during the formative years of a small school.

What was the original vision for the school?

I can't take credit for the original vision. The story's old, but it's true. I needed a sabbatical after running my other school [the Partnership School, an elementary school] for six years. I thought I would take a year off and reflect.

I wasn't allowed to, due to persistent phone calls from folks. The Center for Collaborative Education [in New York City] had come up with this idea of doing a school that would use sports as a means to keep kids in school and keep kids motivated. They put this idea together with the Sports in Schools Foundation. For some strange reason, it got into the heads of people at the Center that no one could do this school but me, so they refused to look anywhere else, no matter how many times I told them I needed a sabbatical. Some of that was because I had sports at the elementary school that I was running. I had made sure that we had some unusual sports because I was trying to give some credence to the idea that children learn in different ways. If you don't have different things going on, you wouldn't know where all of their talents are.

I'm an old middle-school person, so two things worked to make me decide to do this. One was, I always want to demonstrate that the children of the city, this city in particular since I'm here, can be learners and can achieve. I thought this was another opportunity to show that. Secondly, it was my way back to middle school, and I happen to like middle school with all its craziness. Because of that, instead of taking a sabbatical, I decided to go ahead and do this.

And at the core of this school is an integration of . . . ?

Academics and athletics—in the sense of having the children participate in non-traditional athletics and using that little door that you have with athletics as a means of keeping children interested in school. Like most schools we have the usual basketball; but by nontraditional athletics, I mean that we also have bowling, gymnastics, aerobics, tae-kwon-do, tennis, volleyball, soccer, and a bunch of other stuff so that the kids get a sense of other things that they can do, that are called sports, other than the ones they usually do.

And you do all those in this building?

No, we use the city. That's the other thing about New York. New York City is a campus, so we use the city. We have one of the sports, tae-kwon-do, in the building; and other sports are either in the park or in all different parts of the city—uptown, downtown, all over. So on the afternoons that the students have sports, they travel to their sports.

Can you talk some about the qualities of leadership? People have started small schools all over the country and one of the ironies I see is that our old forms of leadership—kind of an autocratic, single leader who fights a good battle—don't work. What are the aspects of leaders for starting a school—which are not, I presume, the same as sustaining a school? How do you reconcile what I've heard you talk about, which is high standards for all kids, a kind of democratic process for faculty and parents, and strong leadership? It seems to me that sometimes people are strong leaders but not very democratic. Sometimes they are very democratic but not really a leader.

The first thing I'm going to say about this whole idea of small schools is that I see them as an opportunity to be more accountable. The fact that a school is small, many times, unfortunately, does not mean that the students are getting a quality education. Those of us who have been lucky to run small schools have to first look at them as the opportunity to do whatever it is that we want to do that's supposed to be good for kids. I think it's essential that the leader of the school, both in starting it and sustaining it, carries the vision of the school.

What does that mean?

The leader of the school has to be constantly pregnant. It's a process of being pregnant much longer than an elephant, before you're allowed to give birth. You're constantly bringing everybody back —yourself, the staff, the students, and the parents—to what the school is about. The leader has to be such a patient person because you will not see what you want at first. Just like when you first start an idea, or when you first get pregnant, there are no noticeable signs. However, it's there and you have to keep nurturing it. You have to understand that it is a viable idea founded in student achievement, that this idea is going to come through, that it's going to happen.

Can you say more about what you mean by "founded in student achievement"?

There is no reason to do a school at all unless you have in mind a way for students to show that they can be better

As much as we would love to, we cannot buy a world for the children. We cannot change the fact that they are going to face racism and all kinds of things. So the main place we can make a difference is in what we give them. In order for them to make it, they have to have enough in their heads, enough wonder, enough experience, enough literature, enough joy, enough enthusiasm for learning and for sustaining human life. That's where the accountability comes.

and for staff to get an opportunity to grow in their profession. Our work that we do here, called teaching, is a profession. We want to maximize our potential. A school should allow educators to do that while students achieve. When you are trying to do a school, whatever you're trying to do with the school is because you think that maybe you have a way, or you have stumbled upon a way, or that together with your staff and parents you can do a better job of teaching the kids.

The vision is locked into that. You have to have an idea. For example, our school tries to focus on academic rigor. This is a catch phrase that a lot of educators use, but I think that what we tried to do first was look at what the academic offering was going to be. In order to have academic rigor, you need to have scholarly and informed educators at the school. You are not going to make kids scholarly and you're not going to be able to share great literature with them if you don't have a handle on that yourself.

That impacts on the kind of staff development you are going to provide for the school and the kind of curriculum you are going to develop. The core of all that is the kind of belief that you have about the children's potential. I mean potential across the board—not just saying "heterogeneous" but really believing heterogeneous—so that you are not going to step back when it's time to teach Shakespeare in the 6th grade and say that some kids can have Shakespeare and some kids can't. You're going to figure out how all children can have Shakespeare; how all children can grapple with some of the ideas that come out in good literature; and, how all children can respond, reflect, and give back what they're getting from the experience of that kind of sharing.

The leader has to believe and has to keep all of that going, keep that conversation going. It's a conversation and a reflection, and it's constant.

One of the areas where I feel that I failed as a leader at my other school was that in the process of collaborating with staff and producing what we were producing in terms of curricula and with our students, we didn't stop to think that there has to be some systemization of the practices in the school. When I left my school, I left it thinking that the teachers are staying and they know what they're doing. The parents are staying. However, it wasn't systematized, and folks weren't accountable for following a particular kind of practice and looking at the children in a particular way. Another idea came in that was different and had very, very different results that in some sense were disastrous both to the students and the teachers and ended up changing the school and having the teachers move on.

I think that one of the things that a leader has to be conscious of is that as you are going through the process of developing a school, you have to systematize and you have to say, "This is the way this school is. We do this, and this is the reason why."

Can you say more about what you mean by that kind of leadership? There are small schools where the directors are kind of selecting faculty for their diversity. We're not just talking race; we're talking everything —pedagogical strategy, curriculum interests, political vision—and then they've got this real tapestry of folks, and they try to run the school democratically and it feels a little chaotic.

Being democratic doesn't mean not being a leader. When I say that a leader has to carry the vision, I mean that the leader has

to carry the vision and be able to give it to many people. The leader has to be conscious of finding ways to share that with everyone else. The kind of nurturing that you're giving everyone—staff, parents, and children—is the kind of nurturing that is going to make them independent. But you always have to have a vision of what collaboration is. You don't just throw up your hands and say, "We're collaborating." Collaborating successfully is actually a very conscious process. Just to say to people "we're collaborating, but write your curriculum," is not it—and, really, when you do that, you're not being accountable to kids.

As the leader, you have to be able to have some sense of what it is that's supposed to happen in every classroom. You have to know what kinds of things need to be going on in curriculum so that you can help and direct your staff and support them as they become more and more independent and more collaborative.

I could give you an example from my other school. I had not done an elementary school. I was given an elementary school because I got a chance to do whatever I wanted—the superintendent said, "Come back to me with your ideas." I thought about it and said, "I'm going to do an elementary school because I'm seeing so many deficiencies in the middle school. Maybe I can fix it."

I have a good handle on teaching, but I wasn't an elementary school teacher. So I had to make sure that I educated myself. Every workshop that the teachers went to, I went to. In fact, I went to more than they did. I went to many whole language workshops and phonics workshops and hands-on math. I really studied and learned and looked at child development in all different ways so that I could be well grounded and have a sense of what it is that is supposed to happen in the school. Leaders have to do that.

Then how do you translate all that to the staff? This is how collaboration works. It works through reflection and a bunch of meetings. I'll explain what I mean.

You want the teachers to use novels. You want a novel-based curriculum in your classes because you believe, as I do, that children learn how to read by reading. So as quickly as you can, you want the teachers to be able to expose the children to reading. I have this thing that I work on with teachers called "Take a Book and Go Creative." Every year, each teacher has to choose one book that they are going to base a six-week curriculum on. Within that book is everything that you need to teach a child well.

What I would do to bring that about is, first, start off by getting literature-based texts. I don't assume that all my teachers know how to handle literature well. A literature-based text gives the teacher an opportunity to have a walker or to have some scaffolding. It gives you an opportunity to begin to point out to the teacher some of the kinds of activities she can have, because the books give some of the ideas and you give some.

We had to always meet as a staff. When we met as a staff, we had to really hold the line and make sure we had a focus where we either had someone come in and share with us or teach us something we needed to learn, or that we really talked together about children and what we were doing with them.

And then, every week, for at least an hour, I met alone with each individual teacher. The director has to do that. And then the teacher shares what they are going to do, and you give them ideas. You have to be a fountain or you have to know where to direct people. If you want people to have workshops and go on trips, you have to be the one saying, "Well, I think that you can go here, or why don't you call up here."

The other piece that I would always ask my teachers is, "What are the children going to produce?" I don't believe students have learned something until they can take it and make it theirs. That was always my thing with teachers. I would say, "Fine, very good, I see that this is a nice unit. What are the children going to produce? How are they going to show that they have internalized this knowledge and that they can create something from it, from themselves?"

You constantly bring the teachers back to that, until that becomes a collaborative conversation in your staff. That's what collaboration means. What are you collaborating on? What are the principles of your collaboration? Collaboration doesn't just happen in the air.

So if we all know that we're talking about what children are going to produce; if we all know that we believe we can take a book and teach a curriculum from it; if we all know that the arts have to be integrated across the curriculum, so that when I go to the science teacher, I have got to see what the children are doing in terms of the arts, and the same for the humanities teacher, etc.; if we all know that, then our collaborations are around those things that we all agree about and that we all want to learn more about.

What I'm hearing is your passion for creating quality education for a variety of classes of African-American children, particularly for poor and working class kids. How do these passions inform your school organization, classroom teaching, forms of assessment --that is, your practice?

I'm going to say something first. I want us to be very careful when we talk about small schools—that we don't as educators begin to think of them as a solution for students who are the disenfranchised of America. The principle of small schools, in which teachers and students know each other well, is good for all children.

American society is best suited for its majority population. So it has created a society in which the majority population, the folkways and mores of the majority population, the values and physical appearance of the majority population, all of those things are more conducive to success. That does not mean that the majority population doesn't have very, very serious needs that a kind of success can mask. So, therefore, good small schools are good for everyone.

The second thing is that before I think about race and class, I always talk about scholarship and teachers. We, as teachers, have to be scholars no matter whom we are teaching. You can't do great things if you're not there with that thought. I, as a teacher, should be able to teach any child well, period. Because I draw my salary from New York City, where 85 percent of the student body are children of color, to justify my saying I'm a teacher in New York City, I have got to show some regular success with the majority population of the children who attend school in New York City.

So because the majority population in New York City's public schools are children of color, I have to have some success there. Now, my bottom line belief is that all children can learn and that all human beings are different and that's what makes this world so interesting. That difference does not mean something negative. Differences are opportunities to explore another way of doing things and to learn stuff that you may not know.

I enter a classroom of kids and I believe that they can succeed, regardless of race or class or whatever. Then I have to be constantly reflecting on the needs of the children. You don't have to discipline people. I see people have discipline codes. I don't have one. Maybe we'll have a discipline outline next year, but I don't know if we will, because I think that every case is different, and you have to respond differently. You have to have a bucket of responses, and you have to tailor your response to the situation. There are times when you have to come in there and do the old principal stuff and say "you're suspended," for whatever reasons. There are times when something may look similar and you take a totally different approach. So you have to be ready for that, because what your eye is on, with everything, including discipline, is teaching and making some kind of impact on that child, so that the children, when they leave you, can leave with more than they came with.

To me, what's relevant is the moment you're in and how you're responding to that moment and whether what you're putting in place is going to be something that the child can use. I'll give you an example. In May, I talk with all of my teachers about next year, about whether, in fact, this is a good place for them. For

the most part, whenever I have a conversation with a teacher about this not being the best place for them, I have not had a problem. Your staff sees if you say, "You know, this is not working." I had a conversation this week with one teacher in which I asked what she thought of her year and where she thinks her strengths are and what her plans are for next year. She told me, and I also told her what I saw. One of the things I was talking to this teacher about was, "You know, you are able to manage your class very well and you are able to get your subject matter across to the children well, but I think there are times you forget that they're kids."

In junior high, kids have really big mouths and they act like they can do anything. In fact, you'd think that they can fly, if you listen to them. But you have to keep in mind that this is a child, and this child can get hurt easily if he doesn't have the right kinds of safety things going, that everything I do with this child is an opportunity to teach. You can't play with them so much, because your playing with them is not giving them what they need to be successful in the next step. So you have to stand back; you want to be their friend, but you can't play with them on their level because you're actually hurting them.

You have to really begin to reflect on that kind of a practice. A leader has to be a very, very reflective person. A leader has to be able to talk in very clear terms with each member of the staff about what they have observed about that staff member's particular way of teaching—whether it's the curriculum, whether it's the behavior, whatever it is, with clear examples so that the staff member can come back and say, "Yes, I see the point that you're making here." Or like the teacher who said, "You know what, you're right. Actually, it's not that I forget that kids are kids; it's that I forget that I'm an adult, because they're so great to hang out with."

I think that sometimes in small schools, you can be so busy with relationships that you forget the rigor that you're teaching. The fact remains that children learn all the time, so we're always on.

Is that part of the role of the teacher-director, of the leader—to remind people of that? Some of the wonderful small schools in New York and elsewhere do an incredibly good job of creating relationships, creating a sense of belonging for kids who have felt like they belonged in no school. But the rigor sometimes falls out.

I think it's part of the role. And do you know how you keep on the rigor? You remind yourself constantly. This was another thing that I was saying to the teachers: as much as we would love to, we cannot buy a world for the children. We cannot change the fact that they are going to face racism and all kinds of things. So the main place we can make a difference is in what we give them. In order for them to make it, they have to have enough in their heads, enough wonder, enough experience, enough literature, enough joy, enough enthusiasm for learning and for sustaining human life. That's where the accountability comes.

I had a parent meeting last Thursday and I told them, "Unless you plan to have a 30-year-old in your house that you're providing for, you're going to have to begin now to put in place the things your children are going to need to make it on their own. I know the world is hard, and I know as parents you're conscious of it—especially parents of color. But accepting certain

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I think that one of the things that a leader has to be conscious of is that as you are going through the process of developing a school, you have to systematize and you have to say, "This is the way this school is. We do this, and this is the reason why."

kinds of behavior from your child, and running interference for your child when your child is wrong, is not going to make them overcome. We have to go another way."

We are conscious of that at school, too. We are not going to be able to run interference for them after they leave us, but what we give them is what's going to work. I upset people when I say this, but I'm extremely tired of folks teaching kids in ways that they would never teach their own children.

I'm tired of us as teachers and educators determining a place in society for the children by what we do with them. I think that we're still relegating, in our practice, children of color to a particular role in society. Sometimes in loving our students, we relegate them to this status. In a sense, we have made some achievements, but we have not given them the opportunities to be the bosses. When are they going to be the boss? I heard Lani Guinier say that: "When is a minority going to have a chance?" You know, are we going to do this thing right? I don't see enough deep belief that you can have a rigorous curriculum in a heterogeneous community of children of color. I don't see enough belief that it's okay for children of color to be the boss now. I believe that is reflected in the kinds of practice and the kinds of curriculum that we choose.

I want to add something to this. One of the things that a leader has to be able to do is experience the pain of trying to assemble a staff that can work well together. Because I did my other school, I have been much more patient at this school. If I hadn't done my other school, I wouldn't know the pain that a leader can go through. You keep thinking that, okay, I got it this year. And then you see it fall apart. But with this school, because I had the experience of my previous school, I learned that around your third year is when the staff begins to come together for you, and that is exactly what happened with this school. Also, the third year is when you have reflected enough and listened enough to children, staff, and parents to be able to really begin to write curriculum that serves those needs.

The only safety net you have is that if you have been focusing on rigor and caring, the children survive your growing pains without losing academically. You're not allowed to have them lose academically while you're growing. But if you have rigor, you can say at the end of the year, "Let me look at the list of books the kids read. Let's look at the activities that they did with those books. Let's look at what they were doing in math. Let's look at some trips they took. Let's see what they did in science." If you are able to look at all of that and say it's fine while you're growing, that's okay. You have to at least have a bottom line. The leader has to start, in spite of whatever, with a rigorous enough curriculum where children are learning while the staff and the leader and the parents and all of us adults get ourselves together. Actually, the only people who are allowed to have time to get themselves together in a school situation are children.

What happened this year was that a curriculum has emerged that we're going to spend time writing this summer. It is called The Essential Elements. One of the first essential elements is a course that we're calling Rhetoric and Composition, which is a course that is going to be based

on good literature. Now what do we mean by good literature? Unfortunately, it's going to have some of that old-time Western civilization literature stuff that really opens up doors for kids, not in the job market but in their thinking. Shakespeare—you can't avoid Shakespeare. He does great things for kids and he does great things for human beings. The arguments in his plays—being able to write about them and give your opinion and be a critical writer about those things and to speak well about those things is essential.

We have another course called Moral Teaching, because I think we need to start talking more about values. But the way we are going to talk about values includes studying philosophers and philosophy. The humanities curriculum starts with the ancient world and goes to the present, and each year we choose a different ancient society. Next year we start with China. So when they are doing their Moral Teaching course, they're going to start looking at Confucius and at some of the Eastern traditions in terms of thinking about the human family and how it should be organized. By the 8th grade, they're going to be looking at Existentialism and trying to figure out what that is all about. And through the kids studying those values and writing about them and disagreeing or whatever, they're going to settle on who their moral selves are.

I'm so excited about it, because it's the first time where I actually can see the voices, see the school. I hear the voices of teachers and students and parents and how they can shape curriculum. But the voices are all coming from the same pot that we agreed upon in the beginning, which is a pot of rigor, a pot of athletics, a pot of relationships.

What advice would you have for educators who are thinking about starting a new, urban, small school?

I think they need to talk with the directors of—I was going to say "successful" and I hate to use that word—but the directors of working small schools. I think they have to study the process, how you bring this about, both in terms of how you work with the district and in terms of how you work within a building, how you share space with other schools. They also need to sit in on some teacher meetings at other schools to see the kinds of things that happen in small schools. In teacher meetings, what is the focus? What is the emphasis?

You have to have a sense of joy about seeing children learn. Everything else is hitting you in the head, but you see this greatness happening, and you can just grab that and say, "I got my start today, I'm okay." And you have to be a scholar yourself. You have to love learning. You have to be constantly reading and learning all kinds of things yourself. If you're not like that, you can't make your staff like that and you can't make the kids like that.

Where do you hope this school is in five years?

This school, hopefully, will be a high school—an elementary school and a high school. And we will have perfected, or at least gotten near-perfect, modeling how all children can be great—how all children can be good learners, how all children can excel on multiple levels. Hopefully, this school can affirm the fact that you don't have to think of children of the city as having to learn less—that the children of the city can achieve greatness.

SYLVIA GIBSON

Sylvia Gibson recently became principal of the new Cregier Multiplex in Chicago. When the old Cregier Vocational High School was shut down by the Chicago Public Schools in June 1995, the central office issued a call for proposals for new small schools to occupy the building, which had been newly refurbished. Nearly two dozen schools applied to become part of the multiplex, and three were selected: one new high school, Best Practices High, and two elementary schools—Nia Academy, an African-centered elementary school with a focus on entrepreneurship, and Foundations, an elementary school with an emphasis on whole-language learning. Nia, with five teachers and 150 children, moved out of its old neighborhood school, Bethune, and into the new multiplex at the beginning of the 1996 spring semester. In this interview conducted by Renee Jones-Welch, Gibson talks about the challenges of the opening days.

Nia Academy came from Bethune. We had a problem the day before the opening: we were told that one of the teachers from the Nia team could not move to Cregier. Needless to say, teachers were upset and I was upset. I thought it was a lateral move from one building to the next. Well, the principal at Bethune was under a different impression. He had a number of students that he had to provide a teacher for, so one teacher would have to stay.

I told the teachers that they were going to meet with him and to please be quiet and at least listen. They said they would let him know which teacher would stay behind. Then they came over here to my office, very upset.

I was saying to myself, "Is this the way to begin my principalship?" They said they would take their students and parents and go down to central office and march. All I could visualize was this is the beginning of my principalship—welcome! Needless to say, we were able to work it out, but not on the first day. The first day that teacher did not come to Nia. All I could say was, "Let's not tell the children; I don't want them to fear their teacher is gone. Let's work on this." It did get straightened out, and in the end, all the teachers were able to make it. But that was one hectic day that Friday. The teachers had to deal with additional students in the building that did not belong to them. A water pipe burst at another school and those students were sent over to Cregier. They also had to deal with the pressure of not knowing if one of their teachers would remain with them. And if she didn't, how were they going to deal with those students? Would they divide them up? The students would not only need to make a move from one building to another, but it might call for a move to another room or from one teacher to another.

I got through this with prayer. Everything worked out well, but with that alone and the additional students, it was kind of shaky. It could have been worse if I had reacted to certain things. It could have become a really ugly situation, and that's not what we wanted in the very beginning, the opening of our multiplex.

That was a beginning that was nerve-wracking for me. But the one thing I feel came out of that shaky beginning was a relationship between the Nia Academy staff and me. A foundation was laid, one of trust and believing and sharing with each other. That has continued. I believe they knew I was trying to understand just as they were. I reassured them: "You go to class and I'll do the legwork and it'll all work out." So they did, and it worked out.

Some people think that this new multiplex is the ideal situation to have, but we have the same problems that other schools have when they deal with central office. They don't realize what we're really about or that we even exist. We still have a lot of problems to work out.

Now I'm getting ready for next fall. I know things are going to happen during the summer. I'm anticipating the furniture not all being in place, transportation not being smooth—but that's what the opening of a school entails in Chicago. You must learn how to improvise: if plan B fails and plan A has already fallen through, you still must go on!

I came from a school where there were 1,500 kids, so everything went wrong —from not having heat to having the parents come in threatening you or having teachers that weren't of the best caliber. I've even had a career service employee say she was going to murder me. I'm just saying I've been through a lot of things. So some things I know. I've worked with budgets enough years to know they don't always do things in a timely manner. We've ordered books in three different languages that never came. Spanish classes were given Polish books and so on. I've been in the system 19 years, and then I worked at central office during the summers, which gave me insight on how things work. I feel comfortable because of having those experiences. If I had come here without having dealt with some of those problems in the past, I would have been hollering, "Oh my God, what else could go wrong!"

chapter

Perspectives: Teachers

If one of us does something that the other doesn't like, we're always clear about what's bothering us, why it's bothering us. We talk about it. We've grown into that. Don't get me wrong—sometimes we don't talk; sometimes we have a yelling match about it, but we communicate. Because we communicate, it's easier to put these things behind us and go on. And the one thing you'll find about us is that most of the issues usually aren't personal; they center around kids.

MICHELLE SMITH

Michelle Smith was the math teacher and one of the teacher-leaders at COMETS, a small school inside Harper High School on Chicago's south side. COMETS enrolled its first class of students in 1993. In an interview conducted by Renee Jones-Welch, Smith talked about the planning and start-up process.

A large part of our planning had to do with our philosophy of education: How do you feel about teaching? How do you get your philosophy of education through? How do you make it a reality?

In addition to that, the huge question was about the school itself: What population do you want to target? Do you want to target freshmen? You always had to have a good reason as to why. If you want freshmen, there's already a freshman small school here—so why do you want freshmen? If you want sophomores, then why do you want sophomores? We decided we wanted sophomores because there was a freshman academy. The time when most kids start having serious truancy problems, pregnancy problems, and dropout problems is in the second semester of the sophomore year. It's not like girls don't get pregnant in their freshman year, but we see a lot of pregnancy during sophomore year, so we thought that would be a good year to target.

Another planning issue was finding staff. Our situation was good—probably easier than most—in that we had a large group of teachers and administrators who were discussing this, a team of 15-20 people. About six or seven of us were a part of the Teachers' Task Force, a group that came in and talked to teachers, so we were already going to weekly meetings. The Task Force was a very open-ended kind of organization. They would ask things like, "How do you feel about teaching?" We were already pretty unsatisfied with the way things were happening in the school. We knew there was a better way; we just didn't know how to make it happen. We talked to our principal at that time, Barbara Pulliam, about what we had discussed with the Task Force. Our principal told us, "The sky is the limit; don't limit your thinking." But that was extremely hard.

That was how Dr. Pulliam was. If you came up with an idea, it was up to you to make it happen. She would give you all the support you needed. She'd say, "Let me worry about central office." She would try to remove all obstacles. But you had to have an idea to work with—she wouldn't give you the idea—and you had to come to her with it. Then you actually had to do the work: your ideas came to fruition because of the time and work you put into it, not because of anything she did. The only thing she would do was remove roadblocks.

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We realized that if we never dream, we definitely would have no changed reality. What we were looking for would not occur if we didn't try, so we must at least try. The first year, we didn't get everything that we wanted, but we did get some things. That was progress. But it was like pulling teeth.

A tricky part of planning a small school involves the dealings with other staff members. There is some feeling amongst them that you are somehow elite or that they would have liked to have done the same things. I don't think administrators sit down and say, "Oh, we like her, her, and her, or we want to assign her to this or that." They say, "If you come to me and you have a good idea, it's going to make me as a principal look good—if it will make test scores go up, which of course makes me look good, then I will allow you to try this." Some people perceive it as favoritism. We were accused of not keeping people informed; but at every meeting, we got up and did talk to people about what we were doing.

Obviously, we were also accused of trying to take the cream of the crop [of students] —but we didn't. We sat down, and it was very easy to set up the criteria for students for our school. We simply said, "If they want to be a part of our school, we'll take them. Regardless of their credit situation, regardless of test scores, if they want to be a part of us, we'll take them."

Then Dr. Pulliam, the principal, left for another job. This was in the midst of our planning. We had a lot of conflict with other staff members and have been sabotaged to no end. First they claimed we got the elite students. Then after that they labeled us as the small school for dummies and only slow kids were part of that. Then teachers started ragging on our kids about being a part of us. Our students had these teachers previously, and the teachers were telling them, "Why would you want to be a part of that?" So not only did we suffer tremendously but our kids suffered. No matter how much we did, we just could not satisfy some people.

We were under the magnifying glass from day one, and I don't know why. It could have been because we had a predominantly young staff. We had, at the time, three very young teachers who had only been teaching for a year, all around age 24. We had one computer teacher who was actually middle-aged but had been at the school herself for only a year. We recruited a science teacher from elsewhere. It was really difficult, just trying to get around the sabotage, and there was an enormous amount of it that I can't even describe to you.

There were lots of obstacles—one was the lack of time for planning. In addition to teaching every day, a couple of times a week we would have to remain after school to make sure that this small school became a reality. It required a lot of work, a lot of our own time. A more ideal situation would have been to plan a small school over the summer, which usually is impossible because there are so many things you need to account for. You have to get your kids in place, and you can't do that over the summer—you have to do it prior to the summer because of programming and scheduling.

You need to have curriculum written and a staff in place. You need to have a location in the building. And those are just some of the things you need to have that we couldn't do before we started. Planning the school took us a total of six months. We ran out of time. A lot of things we had initially planned to do, we haven't been able to do—things that we definitely believe in, like service-learning, which we haven't gotten to. We definitely believe in mentoring and internships, but unfortunately we haven't gotten to them. We wanted to do one field trip per month, or more than that; but because we didn't build that in, plan for it in the beginning, we haven't been able to do it yet. Because once you actually start teaching and you're in there, it's really hard to find the time—with students every day, paperwork every day, just the everyday life of a teacher, it's just really hard to get around to planning or continuing the planning process.

In addition to that, scheduling became a huge roadblock. Even though Dr. Pulliam was removing obstacles for us, I cannot tell you how many days we went down to the programming office just to be told that this "could not happen." And we didn't even ask them to give us a schedule; we made a schedule. We block-scheduled ourselves. Our schedule was doable, but it did not necessarily mean that we would be operating on the same schedule as the rest of the school, which really infuriated people. People saw this as not possible. Part of that had to do with the central office's programming system. You could not program that way. You had to program according to whatever the minutes were allotted per period. We were saying, "That's not the way we're going to do things. We're going to operate on the bell system, but we want you to schedule these kids for these five classes. It will look like they have 50-minute classes, and in essence we're going to adhere to the number of minutes they're supposed to have per week. We're just not going to do

it in the order that the rest of the school does it." People thought that was impossible—people didn't like that we were being "elite" again because we had double periods and extended time. Programming is not an easy thing to do.

As we progressed through the first year, it got easier and easier because we knew which problems would come up. Especially with programming—after that first year we became very adept at getting our particular kids programmed for our particular classes. Also, during our first year, our computer teacher was down on the second floor and we were all on the third floor, which we didn't like much. We wanted all of our kids to remain in the same area if we were going to have ownership, so we moved the computer lab upstairs. We wrote a grant proposal and got the money to rewire a classroom and put a phone line in. Well, then we were really considered elite, needless to say, with all of our kids in the same area with us. There was a lot of objection among teachers about being removed from classrooms in which they had sat for 20 years. They didn't want to be moved. They did not want to give up their classrooms for this small school, regardless of whether the statistics show that smaller environments are better for kids' learning—it was their classroom. So, just trying to get around some of those issues was extremely huge.

A good aspect of planning was our staff cohesiveness. We were very cohesive right away, because we were five very aggressive women, and very up-front. That is how we've lasted for so long with some of the problems we've endured. Some people aren't very honest and up-front about what's going on and how they feel. They do a lot of whispering, whereas we're very honest with each other. If one of us does something that the other doesn't like, we're always clear about what's bothering us, why it's bothering us. We talk about it. We've grown into that. Don't get me wrong—sometimes we don't talk; sometimes we have a yelling match about it, but we communicate. Because we communicate, it's easier to put these things behind us and go on. And the one thing you'll find about us is that most of the issues usually aren't personal; they center around kids.

Sometimes we do believe differently, and probably it has to do with a kid who might supply me with information that maybe they haven't supplied you with, or another teacher with. So I'll have insight into making a decision, and meanwhile, the other teacher says, "No, I don't like that decision," or, "I feel as though you've stepped on my toes." Then I can say, "Let me tell you what my kids told me." We get along very well.

These kids are our future—they are our children. I always use this analogy: if these were their own kids, they would expect somebody to change. I have trouble with the idea that we're not educating certain kids. We must educate *all* kids. All of these kids are our kids, not just the ones we give birth to, but all of them.

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS: HONORING THE DIFFICULT

CAMILLA GREENE

Camilla Greene, a teacher for 20 years, has been involved in the high school reform movement since 1989. In this essay, she describes "authentic relationships," which she calls "the most important component of successful whole-school change in public urban high schools."

It is the authentic relationship conversations that help educators identify their prejudices regarding a particular ethnic, racial, economic, or gender groups. And after the identification of these prejudices, it is the authentic relationship that helps those working with students, and students working with each other, to hold their prejudices in abeyance so that those prejudices do not interfere with the acquisition of knowledge and the academic success of students.

There is much work to be done in restructuring public high schools. Early on, I decided that I wanted to be a doer in educational reform rather than one who writes about it. In the educational reform movement, there are enough books, enough articles; enough has been written about educational reform from all angles. We reformers/educators/researchers know what works and what doesn't work in school reform. What we're not doing to any great extent is implementing on a significant scale what we know needs to be done to help all students learn and succeed in this game of education.

But someone made me an offer I could not refuse. Someone asked me to write about three issues that are prevalent for me in my work as a change agent in schools and in my own classroom—the issues of race, class, and gender. These issues are not popular in educational reform, not popular with educators or education researchers on any significant scale. When the issues of race, class, and gender do surface, they are marginalized—or worse, just plain ignored.

I have read countless school reports, books, and research studies on school change that do not address the issues of race, class, and gender. I have heard writers and researchers state publicly that they have done this or that five-year study on school change and they have published their studies, but then they state that the issues of race, class, and gender are not addressed in their studies. I wonder: Am I on another planet? Are my experiences as an African-American educator who interacts with other educators and with students valid? How could intelligent, well-educated researchers not feel the impact of, or see the ramifications of, or not deal with issues of race, class, and gender as they conduct their research on restructured high schools and classrooms in America?

Writer's awareness: I am conflicted within the conflict. In one sense, I know that the issues of race, class, and gender have a lot in common and are interwoven. In another real sense, however, I feel that we, I, trivialize each issue by referring to them as a trilogy. Each issue is important enough to stand on its own and to be considered in its full dimensions. Having said all that, I will, for the purposes of this writing, refer to the three issues together.

In working with various schools on the broad spectrum of reform, I have encountered high schools that have all the components necessary for successful school restructuring. They are considered models of restructured high schools. In these schools, the teachers work in interdisciplinary teams. They have daily common planning time. They are respon-

sible for the learning of a small group of high school students. There is a flexible schedule that allows students to spend more time on learning tasks. The students are heterogeneously grouped, and there are student advisory groups. Yet these very "successfully" restructured high schools are not able to improve the academic performances of all students. What's missing in these schools, in my opinion, is authentic relationships.

It is the authentic relationship among the stakeholders in a learning community that checks and counterbalances the prejudices and negative assumptions about students' intellectual capabilities. It is the authentic relationship conversations that help educators identify their prejudices regarding a particular ethnic, racial, economic, or gender groups. And after the identification of these prejudices, it is the authentic relationship that helps those working with students, and students working with each other, to hold their prejudices in abeyance so that those prejudices do not interfere with the acquisition of knowledge and the academic success of students.

It is the authentic relationship that enables the learning environment to embrace high academic standards for all students. Once the high standards are set, it is the authentic relationship that makes it possible to build the supports needed to ensure that all students will meet those standards. It is the authentic relationship that helps teachers help themselves and each other push through the obstacles so that all students—regardless of their ethnic, racial, gender, or social grouping—are successful in meeting high academic standards.

Authentic relationships flourish in environments where the people in the learning community are encouraged to talk through "hot button" issues like race, class, and gender. Authentic relationships flourish in environments where people have created an open space to air tough issues—to put them on the table; to confront each other, always with respect; to ask each other what this attitude, this remark, this covert or overt behavior means for the student and his or her academic success. Authentic relationships flourish in places where students and teachers and members of the community know how to discuss difficult topics about race, class, and gender. They may not always agree, but they learn ways to work through the disagreement to solutions or compromises that a majority of the learning community can accept.

As a veteran teacher who has taught in eight schools in three states, certain things have become almost nonnegotiable for me as I work to improve my practice as a teacher. When the superintendent in my school district decided to close our Coalition-member [Coalition of Essential Schools] high school and transfer the students and faculty to two, large, traditional high schools, I decided to apply for a position in the Coalition-member middle school that was going to remain open. It was important for me to remain in a restructured Coalition school where I would be better able to push my practice in accordance with the nine common principles. I and a colleague with whom I had teamed in the high school took the plunge together. We decided to work on a team with middle school students. Being part of a teaching team that built and sustained authentic relationships was important to both of us, and so we became members of the seventh-grade team.

Our team consisted of math, social studies, English, French/Spanish, and science teachers. We had the structures and flexibility necessary to really support whole-school change, increase student academic achievement in heterogeneous classrooms, and continue implementation of the Coalition's nine common principles. We shared a group of about 80 kids and a block of about four hours with which to work with our students. We also had advisories—a time with students that I thoroughly enjoyed, but which not all the members of our team were as enthusiastic.

We met every day as a team. I respected the meeting time, but as the school year progressed, I became disenchanted with the growth and development of our team. We were all committed to working hard, but we had a lot of philosophical differences about teaching and learning. We differed in how we interacted with the students and in our approaches to setting standards and expectations for them. None of these differences was addressed. Instead, our daily meeting time was spent doing "administrivia" and staying on safe topics.

One problem area for me was that in our very heterogeneously grouped classes, we were not able to have all of our students working at high academic levels. I felt we had different standards and expectations for different students. I had some very definite ideas about what we as a team could do to set high standards for all our students and support each student so that he or she could achieve academic excellence. I also wanted to push the team to develop strategies for looking at what our students were producing in our classrooms.

I failed in being able to make the process of looking at student work a central part of our conversations as a team, and I was frustrated at not being able to use our time together to serve as critical friends. We did not have the trust level we needed in order to challenge each other in any way, let alone in a supportive way.

Needless to say, it was not a happy year. We experienced interpersonal conflict. Several times, our team was in crisis and we requested an outside facilitator. One conflict that emerged involved a member of our team who had taken on the role of being our caretaker. As a true "south" in the "north, south, east, west" personality types we used to speak about our working styles, this teacher felt responsible for trying to make everyone happy on our team. She felt constantly torn apart by the philosophical differences that existed among us when it came to issues of race, class, and gender. Philosophically, in our expectations and standards for all kids, this team member and I were in sync. But unlike me, she respected where the other members of the team were. She sensed their fears and wanted to give them "space," while I was impatient with them —I saw the obstructive members of the team as damaging the learning environment of the students.

With the help of an outside facilitator, we did talk about this team member's dilemma. But while we spent 40 minutes on that day discussing the problem our caretaker was having, that was not enough time. We did not deal with deeper issues, and needless to say, the situation was not resolved. As far as I was concerned, we were going through the motions of being a team without coming close to being a team that would improve the overall academic achievement of our students. We did not have authentic relationships, nor did we have the capacity to build them.

In retrospect, I would not have chosen to work with three of the team members had the principal not put us together. I could have forged a working relationship with them if they had been willing to undergo some team building, but they were too fearful of the process and, very possibly, did not trust me. For the most part, they had not had much experience in reflective practice and were too insecure to want to take the risks necessary. I knew that I couldn't use my team-building skills with my own team because I was part of the problem.

I survived the year by creating authentic relationships among the students. I took risks with them and asked them to critique my practice. I enjoyed the time spent in the classroom. I learned a lot from my students. I also learned that it is possible to have all the structures in place and not be able to have an impact on the teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms. And I learned that it is possible to be on a teaching team and still feel isolated. Just having teachers on teams with common planning time is not enough. Before structures, before authentic instruction and authentic assessment, there have to be relationships—authentic relationships. Time must be spent on developing those relationships, and time must be spent maintaining them.

On a Friday afternoon in an elaborate conference center on the outskirts of an urban city, 26 teachers were seated behind tables arranged in a large rectangle so that each person could be seen by every other person. The teachers were a racially mixed group of white and African Americans who were beginning their collaborative work on creating a small summer school for inner-city high school students. In this school, the teachers would be in interdisciplinary teams, and they would create curriculum that would revolve around the nine common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Four teachers would share a group of students and a block of four hours of instructional time with their students.

The teachers were to design and implement a program that would break the isolation of teachers in their classrooms. The topic for this evening's work was team building. How do you construct teams so that teachers can work together successfully? What are the techniques used by successful teams?

I and a colleague had been hired to run this program. We, in turn, had brought in the best researchers in high school reform to help provide this group of teachers with the necessary skills that would allow them to form successful teams. I don't remember what the opening words were, but I do remember that before the researchers had gotten very far in their presentation, the issues of race, class, and gender hit the floor. The next thing I knew, the researchers, with their mouths open, went silent. They turned to me, the only nonmainstream facilitator at the table. I then engaged in a conversation with the teachers.

Two thoughtful and reflective African American teachers were concerned about the fact that before they could team with their colleagues, they had to have discussions with them about what they believed

about kids in general and African American students specifically. They wanted to know where their teammates stood on the issue of whether or not all kids could learn. They wanted to know how they were going to deal with issues of race, class, and gender on their team and in their classroom. And they wanted assurances that these issues would not be swept under the carpet, as they often are. To the best of my ability, I entered into a dialogue with them, and soon other teachers became involved in the conversation as well.

During the two years I worked with these teachers, we had many open and honest discussions about race, class, and gender. These conversations were not always pleasant. A white male teacher expressed anger about having to sit through them. He felt shut out and not disposed to continue discussions that he felt were a waste of everybody's time. One white female teacher left the program in a huff, never to return, because of personal conflicts she was having with an African American teacher. I also remember an African American teacher telling the group how he used his engaging smile to win people over, and how he resented his warm and friendly demeanor being mistaken for weakness.

Throughout the two years my colleague and I worked with these urban teachers, we were able to direct the positive energy that was generated in these discussions about race, class, and gender into making the program work for both the teachers and their students. My colleague and I talked about how we were able to negotiate the many minefields that exploded during these discussions. One of the conclusions we drew from this experience was that if the two of us—apart from our work together in this urban area—had not had discussions about race, class, and gender, we would not have been able to work together and facilitate other teachers having discussions about these same issues.

My colleague and I did not always agree, but we knew how to have these discussions. Unintentionally—or perhaps intentionally—we had formed what I have come to recognize as an authentic relationship. In order to form this relationship, we had been through many difficult and often painful discussions about race, class, and gender. To borrow a notion from a new book by Alice Walker, my colleague and I, through the experience of having these discussions, had "honored the difficult." Without that experience, there is no way we would have been prepared to, or able to, engage in discussions with other educators who were also trying to reform their teaching practices and improve student learning.

I predict that without "honoring the difficult," without engaging in open, honest dialogue, without finding what Lani Guinier refers to as "a commonplace," none of the desired outcomes of improved student learning for all students in America's urban high schools are going to take place. The dialogue has to occur among district personnel, administrators, teachers, students, parents, and members of the communities where urban public high schools are located. The dialogue has to be ongoing and frequent, and it has to be about the covert and overt issues that surround the notions of race, class, and gender in their full dimensions.

Authentic relationships flourish in places where students and teachers and members of the community know how to discuss difficult topics about race, class, and gender. They may not always agree, but they learn ways to work through the disagreement to solutions or compromises that a majority of the learning community can accept.

chapter

Perspectives: Parents

You know, I think that these schools are all works in progress, and that we're going over bumps and we're going over holes, and we're doing this and everybody is saying, "One day this will be it. This will be the best." And you are saying that as the days and years go by. But what happens to the trailblazers, the kids and the families who early on committed themselves to this idea of reform?

HOLDING ON TO A DREAM: PARENTS' HOPES AND FEARS FOR NEW SMALL SCHOOLS

In urban settings where bureaucratic public education systems have served children poorly, newly created small schools have generated much interest among parents eager to find alternatives to ineffective schools—especially at the middle and high school level, where existing institutions are often large, impersonal, and dangerous. In this essay—drawn from interviews and informal conversations with parents whose children attend newly created small schools in New York City—Anne Galletta, Gina Beldo, Pat Ortiz, and Carol Turitz report on the delights and frustrations of these parents' early experiences.

For some time now, we have been looking closely at the experience of parents whose children attend new small schools in New York City. We have been especially interested in the beginning years of these schools. We have wondered: Where do the parents fit into the development of these schools? What draws families—students and the significant adults in their world—to these schools? What keeps them there? What is the nature of home-school relationships, and how does it differ from that in larger, more traditional schools? These questions have shaped our conversations with each other and with many other parents.

The parents with whom we talked, as well as Gina, Pat, and Carol—who themselves have children in new small schools—live close to the experience of these schools. They are in the buildings frequently, sometimes daily; they interact frequently with staff, other parents, and students; and they have been part of many of their school's struggles and victories. In some cases, they have been anchors for other parents and students in a sea of teacher and director turnovers. They are proud of their schools' accomplishments and impatient with their shortcomings. They spend a good part of their days, probably much like the staff in these schools, thinking about what they want for their school while plugging along with what they have. But beyond this, families struggle with a fundamental preoccupation about their children's experience in these schools, asking themselves frequently: "Is this the right place for my child, now? Is it the right place for her future?"

Thus, we write from a particular view that we feel has been obscured in the local and national research on small schools, the view of parents who bring to small schools dreams for their children's future and a belief in public education. But their belief in public education is in deep conflict, somewhere between their vision of what it could be and the reality of what it is. This essay is meant to raise issues expressed by parents, the people who have invested their children's future in these schools.

You know, I think that these schools are all works in progress, and that we're going over bumps and we're going over holes, and we're doing this and everybody is saying, "One day this will be it. This will be the best." And you

are saying that as the days and years go by. But what happens to the trailblazers, the kids and the families who early on committed themselves to this idea of reform?

MAKING THE DREAM A REALITY

Parents and their children chose newly created small schools because the schools promised a good education and a nurturing and safe environment. Families heard from friends and school professionals about a new school that was opening that sounded interesting and of high quality. Parents were concerned about their children's development as adolescents; they wanted a strong academic program and support for their child's social and physical development. The new small schools generated a lot of excitement. They were based on research and good common sense. They had outside partners who brought resources to greatly enrich the school's educational program. Nevertheless, the decision to send a child to a new small school involved a leap of faith on the part of families.

For many of the parents with whom we spoke, their children were part of the first class in the new schools. At the point when parents selected a school, they had an understanding of the particular educational approach and emphasis the school planned to provide. But many of the details of the school's operations had not yet been ironed out. Often, location had not been determined, staffing was still being worked out, and the academic program was not yet established:

My girlfriend said, "Well, you know, I read about this new school, and why don't we just go together?" Her child would have been in seventh grade and mine would have been coming into sixth, and I said, "Well, if you think it would be okay." So I spoke to a lot of people and they thought from all the promises that it sounded like a great thing. It wasn't dawning on me at the time that when something is new it has to go through its birth and its growing pains and all of those things.

The parents characterize this period of the school's development as very exciting—collaboration between parents and staff was high and relationships were close. Although it was a stressful time for all, there was a sense of camaraderie and shared dreams as people intellectually and physically furnished the school. One parent reminisced about her initial involvement, which was far more intense (and laborious) than she had thought it would be:

In the summer we were putting together tables, and I remember using the hammer and banging on the tables, and saying, "I'm not, I'm not doing this, and I'm not doing this for another seven years." But my child is sitting in this school, and there is a need, and this is to help us get to, hopefully, where we need to be.

Parents praise the schools for integrating the outside world into the content and structure of learning for including in their curriculum and methods of instruction the educationally-rich environments beyond the walls of the classroom. Students are excited about learning; it is meaningful to them. They discuss and debate, plan and build, present and critique all sorts of projects.

It was as if the tremendous needs during the first year to simply get the school off the ground reduced the traditional distance—and distinctions of professionalization—between school staff and families. Another parent said that "everybody clung to everybody" during that first year, that "everybody was so needy." And they spent a lot of time together:

The first year, everybody was so happy to have people who were willing to work. We had meetings three times a week, and people showed up for every meeting. And you really felt as though everybody wanted this to work —so the first year, I felt as though there was an equal respect among everybody.

One parent reported that when her child entered her new small school in its second year, she found few opportunities for parents to get involved. The PTA was inactive and most of the decision making was done by the school's outside partner. However, there was a great deal of interest on the part of parents to organize the PTA and address parent concerns. Over the course of her first year at the school, she and other parents established a presence in the school and became a constant source of support and activism for parents and students.

Because many of the new small schools do not draw their students from one particular geographical location, parents have struggled to build a large group of active parents within each school. Many families live far from the school and are unable to travel there for meetings and events. Furthermore, differences in socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, and sometimes gender, make it difficult for parents to come together to talk about their concerns and to act collectively to support and monitor the progress of the school.

Parents talk positively about the partnership between parents and school staff, although they note the unevenness of this partnership across new small schools and over the history of a school's existence. Some parents feel that their hopes of acting in partnership with school staff have diminished as the school has become more established. They suggest that the school's day-to-day encounters with the larger public education system, from which the schools hoped to be freed but in which they found themselves still entangled, have eroded the opportunities parents and school staff have to work together. Some wonder whether the expansive dream for these schools has narrowed, circumscribing the desires of the professionals and only tangentially including the hopes of parents. These parents envisioned the development of the school as a collaborative act, but they frequently feel excluded from the collaboration. As a result of our conversations with parents, we have wondered, as newly created schools move forward in developing their educational program and policies, how can they avoid distancing themselves from families?

THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STRUGGLES OF NEW SMALL SCHOOLS

Parents are enthusiastic about what their schools have accomplished and the ways in which their children have benefitted from them. Safety is high on the list, and so is children's level of comfort and positive interactions with staff. The schools are heterogeneous in students' academic, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic background, and this fact is

important to parents. They also talk positively about the school's partnership with outside groups, such as universities, nonprofit organizations, and cultural institutions.

Parents praise the schools for integrating the outside world into the content and structure of learning—for including in their curriculum and methods of instruction the educationally-rich environments beyond the walls of the classroom. Students learn lessons about work and community health in hospitals and community agencies; they explore museums to learn about art, science, and history; and they study engineering and architecture through trips across their city and exposure to urban planning and design. Students are excited about learning; it is meaningful to them. They discuss and debate, plan and build, present and critique all sorts of projects. Parents note this excitement and credit the schools with successfully engaging their children in learning.

Parents talk about the long hours that teachers dedicate to planning for the school and for their classes and their enormous level of commitment. They describe teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, affection toward the students, and keen interest in providing a quality educational experience. They talk about the many meetings teachers attend, sometimes with parents, as they plan curriculum and assess the school's progress. They also mention teachers' willingness to call a student or family member to talk positively about that student's progress or to follow up on a point in class.

Yet for every accomplishment, there has been a struggle—and, often, the struggle persists. For example, although parents praise the student-teacher relationship, they note that advisories, a vehicle often used in small schools to achieve this closeness, are sometimes poorly used by teachers who do not understand their purpose or do not know how to achieve that purpose, or who disagree with the utility of the advisories and do not cooperate in carrying them out.

Parents and children unanimously agree that the new small schools are safe places. Parents are pleased that hard-to-find dollars are not spent on weapon detection devices that impersonalize and demoralize students. Parents also report that a local nonprofit provides students, teachers, and families with conflict resolution training programs. In addition, the positive relationship that students have with staff often allows staff to intervene in situations before they escalate into violence. Nevertheless, students are not impervious to the conflicts that arise when they share a building with other schools. Issues of turf create tensions between students in the new small schools and those in the already existing traditional school that occupies most of the building. Also, as schools add on a grade each year—often the practice for a new small school—they might be operating in an increasingly crowded setting while they anticipate a move to a new building but wait for its completion. This lack of space results in increased tension among students and between students and staff.

Although parents praise the heterogeneity of students attending their schools, they are concerned about the school's ability to serve all students equally well. Some of the parents with whom we spoke have children with special needs, requiring resource-room services or special education. These parents report that their children need to be better supported. They are concerned about the lack of funding and staff for these students, as well as the challenge for teachers in providing for students with special needs within their heterogeneous classes.

Parents note that some schools have developed strategies to better support children with special needs. For example, a school that shares space with several other schools also shares resource-room staff. Nevertheless, parents who have children with special needs are concerned about their children's education. They are not comfortable with staff's assurances that mainstreaming in a small school will be sufficient for their child. Although parents are very aware of the failures of the current school system, including the vast and bureaucratic special education system —and they know too many stories of African American and Latino children wrongly placed in special education—they are reluctant to let go of certain policies and practices. They are especially reluctant when they feel that the new schools have not sufficiently replaced a traditional or mandated policy and practice with a better alternative.

Parents also wonder if their newly created small schools inadvertently produce disparities among children in the kind of education they receive. They note that their schools struggle to provide the kinds of courses students need to broaden their academic experience, especially courses that parents feel satisfy college entrance requirements. For example, at the high school level, parents would like their children to learn a foreign language, but this is not always available in a new small school. Other courses, such as physical education and music, are also missed by parents. Parents see such courses as providing students with a creative outlet, a place to develop their talents, and an

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opportunity to garner some scholarship money for college. The parents note that some families will be able to fill in the gaps left by new schools by providing their children with tutoring and private lessons. But other families will not have the resources:

The reality is that these parents have the money to afford the resources to supplement the education that their children may not be getting. Whereas for other parents, such as myself, the school is the basis of education.

Parents are also concerned that classrooms often lack basic resources, like textbooks and lab equipment. They are particularly disturbed about the lack of textbooks, which they feel deprives students of an important resource that they can use at home and in school. Xeroxed chapters of textbooks, magazine articles, and literary pieces are very common. Parents worry that children take xeroxes less seriously than textbooks, and they find it difficult to get a sense of their child's curriculum when there is no textbook. Though they are cognizant of the tendency of textbooks to present biased depictions of history and to perpetuate racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes, they worry that without textbooks, it will be harder for children to achieve the curriculum standards expected of them. Many new small schools do not have a library, so children must depend on their neighborhood libraries, which vary greatly in their offerings and hours. Parents are concerned, too, that without adequate reference materials, children's ability to research and critique what they read is hindered:

It gives teachers and schools and everybody who's teaching our children carte blanche. Once a teacher gave my child something on Cuba. It was total propaganda! It was about how little Juan had escaped to America and he ran from that evil Fidel Castro and how wretched and horrible it was in Cuba and how the great U.S.A., which is great, saved him. But there was nothing documented. Because of who we are, I told my child, "Look, I have Cuban friends who are happy."

This is not what I want you to teach my children. If you teach my children about Cuba, let them be able to turn the page after your lesson and see that maybe little Juanita is happy there. Maybe she's happy in Cuba, or maybe she's not happy, but she loves her native land and they're working to strengthen it.

HOPES AND FEARS OF PARENTS WHO SELECT NEW SMALL SCHOOLS

Clearly, concern for the academic progress of one's child is the primary motivation for parents in selecting a new small school and becoming actively involved in helping the school develop. Parents are full of praise about what their school offers, yet critical of what remains to be done. They want alternatives to the massive size and inadequate education of the large traditional high schools. But they worry that their child will not receive the kind of curriculum that colleges demand and will not be assessed in ways that colleges find acceptable:

You know what? I was never looking for innovation in terms of education. I was looking for a good education, because of what kids are going through themselves as teenagers, especially in middle school and into high school. I thought that new small schools, if not tried and tested, were researched enough and experienced enough that while they were a work in progress, things would get better. You know, I understood that we wouldn't have everything we wanted, but I thought we would have everything we needed. The expectations that I had were no more than I would expect from a traditional school, except the fact that safety was less of a concern in an environment like this.

Parents also often express another motivating influence for their work in new small schools—a desire to see public education serve children better, particularly children of color and those from poor and working-class families. They feel a strong dedication to the students in their school and are committed to helping the school develop:

The children keep me going—them knowing I'm going to be there. As a matter of fact, they call me, the students at school—I don't know how my phone number goes from one to another person, but I think all 200 or so of them have my number. I'm not sure if it's on the bathroom wall, but they'll call me at home. It's them, you know, who keep me going. I'm staying there for my child and for them. Because I do believe the school can have a really great impact on their lives if we all, as partners, can sit down and communicate for the children. Then we can get somewhere.

Sometimes this desire for reforming public education comes into conflict with looking out for one's own child. In a conversation we had while drafting this essay, Pat and Gina struggled with this conflict. We were talking about a parent who had decided to take her child out of a new small school after two years. The parent had been very active in the development of the school. We wondered, had she grown impatient too soon?

Pat: Not necessarily. She's thinking of the best thing for her child. I mean she . . .

Anne: That's a dilemma.

Gina: The dilemma is, Where does my allegiance go? Does my allegiance go to this program?

Pat: Or to my child?

Gina: We may never see anyone from our school again. But we will always be the mother to our children. Do you understand? And what do we say . . .

Pat: What do we say to a parent who feels the school has not fulfilled its promise of a good education for her child? Do we say, "You know, it takes five years for a school to develop to where it's supposed to be?" But . . .

Gina: But that's the academic life of a child.

Pat: Within that five years, my child has graduated.

As indicated in our conversation above, the concern about one's own child becomes the overriding factor influencing a parent's decision to "stick with it" and grow with the school, or enroll the child elsewhere. But every now and then, in the midst of frustration, parents concede that outside of new small schools, there are few options in urban public education:

See, I'm very frustrated. It's obvious, I guess, in this discussion, because this is not what I bought into; this is not what my idea of reform is in terms of the dissemination of information, in terms of inclusion, in terms of assessment and accountability, in terms of curriculum. This is not what it is, and yet it is still a lot better than what we had.

And so conversations with parents whose children attend new small schools, particularly parents active in the development of the school, reveal people engaged in both a private and a public struggle. Within their own family, they are determined to provide the best education for their child; in a broader context, they live in neighborhoods and in a city that they believe has been poorly served by public education. They desire change and are willing to work for it, for their child and for other children in the city.

Despite the struggle, parents feel that they are contributing much and that their children are learning a lot from their parents' activism. During one conversation, Anne asked Pat, Carol, and Gina what they felt their activism communicated to their children. Pat laughed and said that her child often gave her a hard time about being in the school so much. Nevertheless, Pat said she felt it had sent a clear message to her child:

To fight for what she believes in—to fight for it, you know, even when you may not win, as long as you believe there is a possibility that you will. And that's what my child believes, that I'm fighting for something that's for her betterment. So she fights for what she believes in.

Carol agreed:

I found that active parents have active children. Active parents' children know what it's like to fight a system because they're living with this in their homes and they're seeing their parents fighting the educational bureaucracy just so they can have a safe seat, just so they can have a book, just so they can have whatever it is that their tax dollars have said they are supposed to have. I watched the kids in our school coming from different neighborhoods and different backgrounds —and in the active homes, where their parents were active in the educational plight, the children were also very active in many things.

New practices—whether interdisciplinary curriculum, block scheduling, advisories, or authentic assessments—are neither magical nor virtues in themselves. When used appropriately and effectively, they can powerfully access learning. But when they mistakenly are transformed from strategies into goals, the reform can become procedural rather that substantive.

Fifteen years after Manhattan East began, the "pioneer parents," as they called themselves, still comment on how "starting a school was one of the highlights of our lives."

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, our conversations with parents in new small schools did not specifically focus on the roles of parents. Instead, they were rich in detail about a place that provided their child with the promise of a good education and affirmed for parents their hope in public education. Parents talked about a good teacher, a lesson their child had learned that will help her all her life, their concern about children meeting curriculum standards, their frustration about how money was or was not being spent, their pleasure with the resources that outside partners provided, their anger over the bureaucracy of the system, their uncertainty about assessment practices, and their desire to see their school succeed. As a result, we have emphasized these issues here. We believe that new small schools need to create "space" for such conversations to take place among families, students, and staff—particularly in their beginning years, but also as the schools become more established.

The parents with whom we spoke are enthusiastic about the creation of new small schools in New York City. They witness the effects of these schools in the progress of their child and other children. But as they hold on to their dreams of where these schools will be one day, they deal on a daily basis with the reality of where they are now. It can be like a tease for parents—and probably staff—a peek into the window of full-scale educational reform. However, waiting for the dream to become a reality may simply be too costly for parents, especially those who cannot supplement what the school does not yet provide. The educational future of their child supersedes the hard work they would like to devote to school reform.

I'm not noble. I'm not the parent to trail blaze and to have my kids struggle and not get something, and then to have the class of 2000 meet the Goals 2000. You know, that's not what I want for my kids. I want my kids to get the best now. And I think that they should be supported. I mean, we've given our greatest efforts to the school; we've given them our children.

Nevertheless, entering into the vision, partaking in the dream, often leads parents to a level of activism they did not have before. As they monitor the progress of the school, advocate for additional programs—especially programs they feel will give their children a competitive edge in applying for colleges—and pitch in wherever possible (whether it's building tables or pressing for resources), they feel deeply connected to the school's success, for their child's sake and for the sake of bringing about significant reform in public education:

What keeps me going? The co-directors of my school keep me going. They haven't lost the vision; they are willing to listen to criticism. And the dedication of most teachers working with what resources they have. And the fact that my school takes all kinds of children, not just the "A" students, but kids that have been struggling. What keeps me going? Because I saw that kid walk into our school, and when I saw that same kid leaving, I saw a different child.

MARY JONES

Mary Jones is a woman who wears many hats for Chicago's DuSable High School—she is an alumna, parent of four children who attended the school, and DuSable's community representative on the Local School Council. In this conversation with Renee Jones-Welch, she talks about DuSable's new small schools.

What do I like about small schools? I really like them. With the small schools, each child has individual personal contact. The teachers know that child, and the parents know who to go to when their child isn't doing well. I like the whole concept—you can get discipline done in small schools, and I don't have to relate to 20 people; instead, I can stay in one place, deal with one facilitator and teacher. That gives a better understanding.

Take our parent meetings at report card pick-up day, for example. We orient parents to know that, okay, your child goes to DuSable High School, but we have small schools, such as Business, Art, LEGS, Health, etc. Our parents know they can't just say, "my kid goes to DuSable." They know they can come in and say my child is in LEGS (Law, Economics, and Government Studies—I just like the term LEGS because I'm tall) and I can direct them. So, with all the years I've attended, and my children have attended, and now that I'm community rep, I think this is the best idea for DuSable, having small schools.

I like this best because it's like a one-on-one, like a family working together. And I see the inspiration among teachers. They're doing more—they want to give and get the best for their school. It's competitive, but it's a good kind, like in a family, friendly way. And parents are excited when they realize they can come here and know their kids are getting a taste of what the real world is. Even the programming office is getting involved in small schools. Everyone, all departments, are helping each other to do small schools.

When they ask what is this all about, I tell the parents, "They [the kids] still have four years of English, four years of Social Studies, etc., but they build into it in a way that's related to a field in the outside world. I know if I'm in Med Tech, that I will still have my core classes, gym, or ROTC, but my focus will be in something I'm interested in."

Just like I started out wanting to be a nurse—when I was here [at DuSable] we just took science classes, but now at DuSable if I want to be a nurse, my first choice would be the Medical Technology school. And I used to be a person that didn't talk much, so if I was here now, I might have joined the Communications, TV, Radio small school, because that focus would've helped me to talk and communicate.

We get a lot of questions from the community about schools-within-a-school: "How can you have that, Ms. Jones, that's just DuSable." So as we go around to our feeder elementary schools, we tell them it's a little school where you have about 120 kids—it's a place where they're knitted together closely, where the teachers can keep up with attendance, or be able to tell whether the child is going to drop out. So the community is looking at this and saying, "Okay, we don't have to worry about attendance, dropouts, and the kids are learning." So they're all right with it. And they know within a small school, the staff will get in touch with you. You don't just come here on report card pick-up day. I'm talking about parents and the community. They have to get involved.

chapter

Perspectives: Students

These new schools must embrace a bolder and more ambitious dream: they must strive for excellence and equity.

Angela, Patrice, and Latoya were seniors at COMETS, a small school inside Chicago's Harper High School, that focuses on communications and technology. In this interview conducted by Renee Jones-Welch, the three students share their experiences, from entering the new school as sophomores during its first year in 1993 to being part of the first graduating class in June 1996. While the dropout rate at Harper approaches 60 percent, 30 out of 34 of COMETS' first senior class graduated.

Tell me about the beginning.

Angela: When we first got into the program, we were told that we would see the same five teachers all day, everyday—the same people all the time! Man, everybody was tripping; everybody wanted to get out of this program. We really wanted out because we saw the work was hard. We wanted to get back to the rest of the school where you hardly do anything. We were ready to rejoin the other school [Harper], because you don't have to do hard work. But before we were about to get out of the program, me and Ms. Howard [teacher Sarah Howard] had a conversation, just talking, and I realized she was kind of straight. I stayed to get to know her a little better and, man, I've been here ever since!

What was the conversation about? Something must have persuaded you to stay.

Angela: It was about a girl who didn't like me. She [Ms. Howard] told me, "That girl doesn't have a reason not to like you; you're really a nice girl, and she should have more respect for you and herself." I listened to her and I got to know Ms. Howard on a personal level.

Patrice: What I like is when you have a conflict with another student, they [the teachers] bring you face to face together, sit you down, and make you talk it out. After they step out of the room, you and the person you had conflict with sit and talk about what and how it really happened. Once you look at it, then you realize it was really stupid. A hundred percent of the students are not always ready to do that, but those who are willing to sit down and understand and hear each other out—man, it can really work out! Usually, most people at Harper just want to fight.

Tell me about the challenges you've run up against.

Latoya: The classroom work. I remember one class we had sophomore year, which was computer programming, and all the students hated that class because it was the most challenging class we had. It was sad. The students would do programs and just cry as we did them because the teacher was hard; she would make us do the work ourselves. The teacher would help us, but not until the program was done and we couldn't debug it. It was a mess.

Since you've been in COMETS all along —since you're part of the first graduating class tell me where it's come from, how it has improved.

Angela: My first year, sophomore year, everybody was trying to fight everybody because they were always around each other, all the time: "We see you all the time; I'm sick of you." Now you hardly see fights with the seniors. If they've got a problem, then they sit down and talk about it first. They say, "I have a problem with you." The sophomores need to come to where we are. Sometimes we look at them and you can see the sophomores coming from where we used to be. They are a lot worse, and they're trying to fit in.

Patrtice: They [teachers] tell us to look out for them, like little brothers and sisters. We do that. If we see them do something wrong, we let them know: "Yo! You can't do that," or, "Watch out—the teachers will snap if you do this or that." We let them know, from our years of experience with these five teachers, what to do and what not to do.

Does COMETS have a good reputation now that it's in its third year?

Latoya: Yeah, but you know we had to work up that reputation. For the most part, teachers in the school were talking about us, saying, "It's unfair—they're pampering us and we're spoiled." But it really wasn't that way. So we had to work our way up. We were doing different things in the program that most people were not doing in school, like painting the lockers, making videos. So it wasn't the students downing our program; it was basically the adults, the staff. Now COMETS' reputation is better. I made a lot of friends here; we kind of grew up together.

Patrice: Now it's kind of like a big family reunion.

Angela: If it wasn't for COMETS, I would have probably dropped out by now. I didn't like school at all, period. I did my freshman year but there was no kind of challenge. So I would stay at home every day. But in COMETS, you can't stay at home without some teacher calling your home. They want to know what happened, where you are, why aren't you at school. If you're absent three or four days, they'll come to your house.

Patrice: COMETS, in my opinion—and I don't know if anyone will agree—is the hardest program in the school. I feel that if I were in a regular class at Harper, I would get all A's.

Latoya: I was the geek of the class, always wanting to do all the math work. And for some reason, Freda couldn't stand me for that. I ignored her. But after a year of us getting to know each other, we became really close friends; we kind of grew on each other. There's some things you just can't work out; but for the most part, it's all good.

Angela: I went to algebra every day. When I came to COMETS, we started doing all this other math, so I had to learn. Man, I had fallen asleep all the time in my math class freshman year.

Latoya: It's harder because the teachers care about us and they have such high expectations of us. So we have to meet those expectations and live up to them.

chapter

Perspectives: P.S. 261

It's thinking beyond what exists now; it's that dreaming part of it. Let's pretend like the barriers aren't there right now. What could we have for our children? What do we really want for our children?

Ten years ago, P.S. 261, located in the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn, was a low-performing neighborhood elementary school where fewer than one-third of the students scored at grade level on standardized reading tests. The building included a magnet "gifted" program, called the Discovery Program, that attracted middle-class white students—but Discovery operated as an isolated school-within-a-school.

*Teachers and parents then came together to ensure that **all** students receive the same high quality teaching and learning that exists in the "gifted" program. Now, after an eight year "ground-up" process, P.S. 261 is a building that houses four small, racially and socioeconomically diverse schools: the Discovery Program; the New Program, which has a curriculum similar to Discovery's; the Children's Learning Cooperative (CLC), a kindergarten - 2nd grade school; and the Multicultural Learning Connection (MLC), a school for grades three-six that is built on an interdisciplinary curriculum. Student achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, is already above average and is rising steadily.*

*In the following interviews, conducted by Kenneth Foster in 1996 and 1997, P.S. 261's former principal, a teacher-director, parents, and students share their perspectives about the process of creating—and being part of—small schools designed for academic excellence **and** racial and class equity.*

FORMER PRINCIPAL: ARTHUR FORESTA

Can you tell me a little about the history of P.S. 261?

This used to be a large neighborhood school. It had a small program that the superintendent had placed into the school, without much consultation with the principal at that time, nor the staff, nor the community. We have almost 800 children now, and then I think it had a little over 400. So the building was under utilized, and the superintendent said, maybe a way that we can fill it is to start a gifted program and start it in kindergarten —and then with years it grew.

By the time I came here—I'm finishing my ninth year at the school—the gifted program had grown up to about the 4th grade. And then it continued to move on to the 6th grade. So that was the first program, but that's not the way small schools should happen, with superintendents just walking in and imposing.

What was the original vision for the small schools?

The way I explain it is that there are almost photographs in my mind. I can see corridors; I can see classrooms; I can see what children are doing; I can see what teachers are doing; I can see where parents are, and I can see what the principal is doing. It's always changing, being modified, but it is a picture that's in my mind, and I think I've collected those photo-

graphs in different ways. One of the ways that had the strongest impact was when I was working at the district office and they were going to start a small school called the Brooklyn New School. I was asked to help write the proposal.

In order to write an informed proposal, I went to visit some small schools, and one that really sticks out in my mind is Central Park East in Harlem. I went into a classroom—this is maybe 10, 11 years ago—and I remember the teacher's name and I remember what the children were doing. I was so impressed with the level of activity, the quality of the activity, the interaction of the children, the richness of the materials, the choices, that when I left that school I said to myself, "If I ever become a principal, I will want every classroom in my building to look like this." So basically, the beginning of the vision was when I walked into that place.

When I came here, I saw a large school with a very different method of instruction, and I guess my plan was: how do I take what exists and help facilitate a movement toward what then was my vision and hopefully would become more of a collective vision over the years?

It's been an interesting journey. You kind of approach it in a somewhat simplistic way at the beginning. My idea—and I think research probably says it's not the best way of doing it—was to encourage a number of teachers and parents to come together and think about the development of a new school. What I was naive about is that whenever a principal encourages something like that and a small portion of the staff and a small portion of the parent body get involved, there are reactions from the larger community of staff and parents. They say things like: "Is this what the principal expects? Is this what he appreciates? Is this all he appreciates? Is this his favorite program? Are we less favored? Are we less valued?"

It didn't take long to go from what people refer to as a honeymoon period for a new principal to some very critical times in the second, third, and fourth years when there was tension, turmoil, conflict. So it was not just this continuous smooth road. It was a rocky road, but there were periods of acceptance, growth, and appreciation. And there were periods of insecurity, sabotage, you name it. There were also times when we did nothing. There were times when we took a year or two and just coasted for a while because we needed a rest.

Were most of the tensions around issues of involvement or perceived lack of involvement or control, either on the part of parents or faculty—particularly those who may not have been included initially during that sort of planning?

Well, the door was always open. I guess an important part of my vision is that not only children collaborate and grow as learners, but everyone in the building does. Adults grow, as children do—sometimes individually, but often in a more social and more collaborative kind of relationship. I realized shortly after the formation of the New Program that if the goal is to begin to break the isolation of teaching and to get teachers to begin to communicate, plan, grow, and support each other, that there should be a lot of opportunities for that.

A lot of us also interview parents at the beginning of the year. We call and ask for an interview, just to say, "Listen, you've known your child for five or six years; we've only known them for a month. What can you tell us to help us?" That seems to really change the dynamics a lot, that right off the bat we're honoring what parents want to tell us about their kids.

So using flexible scheduling, I began to create "common time" for anyone interested, and it could be for any purpose. There was a group of teachers who had an interest in the arts; they wanted to increase use of the arts in the curriculum. And so there was a common time for those people to meet. Amongst them, someone emerged as a leader, and I encouraged that person to take a greater leadership role and created even more time for that person to lead. Some people became interested in something called the primary-language record—a form of alternative assessment. I helped bring in a consultant, who was paid through outside funding, to help support those people, and there was leadership development within that group. That group actually included a lot of early childhood teachers who began to think about forming their own school, which became the second school in this building; it's called the Children's Learning Cooperative (CLC). But it really started as a group of people who were talking about ways of doing more effective assessment.

If you looked at the schedule then, and it's true now also, there were all of these blocks of common time. That was a very important period. If you can go beyond the one person—get two people talking, three, eight, whatever, then you have a start. My job was to sense that out, let people know that this is something that is valued and encouraged and I supported them with resources, with time. I think people gradually realized that, well, it doesn't seem like he's just favoring that first small school; he's giving attention to this group and to that group.

But we're talking about sticking to something over a long period of time: the final group didn't come together until maybe a year ago. And I want to shout those words out—sticking to something. I've been an educator for 32 years and I've seen wonderful, wonderful ideas be judged their first or second year and people gave up on them. One of the lessons I learned is just stick to it.

Can you talk some more about the elements of leadership that you consider to be crucial for starting and sustaining a small school?

There are all different levels of leadership here. I'm still the building principal. There are teacher-leaders in the programs and there are parent leaders, so there are different kinds of leadership. Leadership is basically taking the power that is given to an individual just by position—like the principal inherits a considerable amount of power—and then sharing it with a large number of people in a pretty equitable way. I'm really pushing this to its limit as to how much of my power can be shared. I really want to be an equal partner, but you have to realize that in the old model of the individual with power, the subjects may whine and complain at times, but there is a comfort in security. It's almost like having the very powerful parent creating a secure environment for the children.

As there is this transference of power, people have to become independent—they can't depend on the leader all the time. They have to be responsible, and with that can come a level of insecurity. So again I go back to a long-term process. I think a mistake that is made in the system is that they might look at a place like P.S. 261 nine years later and say, "Oh, how interesting—a principal with three small schools and three teacher-leaders. Well, there's that school failing out in Staten Island, and why don't we just do that for September? Why don't we just tell them to

make three schools by September?" Unfortunately, some very powerful people talk that way. They have no real sense of growth, of what it means to change and grow.

How do you harmonize commitment to a democratic process for parents and faculty with maintaining leadership in your role as principal?

The way the democratic process manifests itself now is that the leaders of the three mini-schools and a representative of the program (there is still the gifted program that is not a mini-school) form a cabinet with me. They meet with me on a pretty regular basis. That allows for cross-communication among the small schools. It allows, also, for us to deal with building-wide issues collectively. Decisions are made by consensus. Within the mini-schools, each of those leaders has staff meetings, and they also have what are called steering committee meetings with parents.

Parents have an opportunity to participate as partners. The definition of that participation varies from school to school. The debate is to what extent a parent is consulted and to what extent do they actually make decisions. There is a feeling in some of those schools that if the staff are trained, experienced professionals, they should make the decisions. They have the obligation to involve the parents, to take their point of view and be influenced by it, but the final decision is still in the hands of the teachers. They're wrestling with different models—the Children's Learning Cooperative tends to lean a little bit more toward having parents sit at the table and make the decisions with teachers—but it is always a very democratic process.

The concept of decision making by consensus is something we really try to stick to in this school. It can be very frustrating because there is sometimes a temptation to say, "We have been talking about this enough; let's just take a vote and let the majority rule." We have not gone to a vote like that because we feel that if we don't have a consensus, then we have to work at it more until we reach one; and if we take a vote, those who are opposed to it are going to find different ways of not being supportive, and that's not good for the community. So that's another level of democracy.

My role in all of this is going to change—because you're talking to me at a time where we're optimistic that our school board will recognize this building as a building of small schools with teacher-leaders. That is probably going to have a dramatic effect on my role because although the leadership was shared, there still was something principal-like in the way I've conducted business. I see myself now as becoming a mentor for those leaders. Many of them are classroom teachers—they're not necessarily trained or experienced as leaders. They come to me for advice or suggestions, and I like being in that role.

But some of my role hasn't been defined yet, and I don't think you can have a rapid change in expectations. There are still going to be teachers who are going to come to the principal before they go to their colleagues. There are still going to be parents who say, "Well, I don't want to talk to that teacher-leader; I want to talk to the principal." I know there is going to be a transition time, and I have to play a role in that to continue to encourage the parents and the teachers to see me as a resource, but the heart of the discussion and the heart of the decision making still has to happen within their community. I'm a part of their community, but they're an even more integral part. I'm just a resource that they can tap into.

I think there is always a very important role for an individual leader—to model the expectations, to model democracy. If I talk democracy and I act in an undemocratic way, the message that gets across is what my actions are showing, not what my words are saying. There is no doubt in my mind that the building takes on a personality that is the result of a lot of people, but the principal or the leader can have a strong impact on what the personality or the climate of that building is. Now, more than ever, that's going to happen in the small mini-schools. Each may take on a character of its own, because of the leader, because of the participants and, so on.

What are some of the major changes in the school since you've been here?

I'm just beginning this process of looking at some of the research on small schools and schools in general, and I've come across some statistics which report that across the nation, 80 percent of the students in urban public schools are poor children and that some 80 percent of that group tend to be people of color. How have you seen the small schools attempt to help poor and minority children excel? I mean obviously one of the goals of your small school is to achieve a sort of equalization across racial groups. How have you seen that fall out over the last seven years?

Well, if we go back to when I first came here, this was always a very diverse

community—socioeconomically, racially, all ways. But the school did not reflect that. Before that superintendent made the decision about the gifted program, the school was predominately Latino and African American, and socioeconomically it was mostly poor families, including the working-poor and working-class families. Yet the community was far more diverse than that.

What the gifted program did is bring in children not just from this community, but from throughout District 15; it became like a magnet program. It brought in what was a more affluent and a whiter student population, but it isolated them. Because it was a track within the school.

That concerned me when I walked into the building. Because philosophically, I'm offended by homogeneity and by racial isolation. So I felt I had a role as a leader of the school to change that. Some people, including staff, advised me by saying, "Well, just get rid of that program—tell the superintendent to go put it in another building." But I said to them, "Well, what problems do you have with the program?" And then they stated the problems, and I said, "Why don't we work on the problems and create a new model?"

But the issue got lost; it did not get the full attention that it should have gotten. And then, in the last year or so, I became very vocal about it by writing a three-page letter directly to parents about my observations of this model and why it needs to change. I became part of the district task force for gifted education and became a vocal critic, and it has shaken things up, at least to the point where now time and attention are being given to looking for a new model.

In the meantime, it still is for the most part a racially isolated and class-isolated program. But what's happening is that there is a new confidence in the rest of the school. The community came in sometimes looking just at the gifted program. Whenever they came to see the gifted, I said, "Yes, you can see a gifted class, but you also have to see two other classes." And they began to come back and say, "Well, I notice so much of a difference in the educational practices in the Children's Learning Cooperative from what there used to be here." And I tell them that's right because that's what we're trying to do here.

So all of a sudden, people began to register their children in kindergarten and grades one, two, and three. The interesting thing I noticed is that people were reluctant to place their children individually in classes where they would be minorities. Let's say in this case there would be white families who were reluctant to place their children into a class that was predominantly children of color. But when six or seven white parents who came to visit talked to one another, they'd become like a group and say, "All right, we're going to make a commitment to this—we're going to come in together." They were comfortable with integration. They wanted that, by the way. The school became a place where people who really believe in that and their vision of what society should be like became attracted to the school.

We started getting various requests from beyond our community boundaries, from great distances, from people wanting to come to the school. This year, for example, we have received more than 100 variance requests from outside community boundaries. I think they like the educational factors, but they also like that respect for, encouragement for, diversity, integration, multiculturalism, and so on. So when you visit the classes, especially kindergarten, first, second, third—and then it begins to drop off a bit in the upper grades, but it's moving up each year—you'll see a level of integration and diversity that this school had never experienced before, even though it was right beyond its walls.

TEACHER-DIRECTOR: MARK BUSWINKA

How long have you been teacher-director for CLC?

I have to think about that for a minute, because I'm thinking about history. It was four or five years ago that people started working together really closely. So that's when we were really founded, but we didn't have a name or a philosophy. And it must have been three years ago that we had our major formative year where we got all the staff together. That's when we had our meetings with parents, in terms of defining the philosophy. We had joint meetings where we said, "What do you want?" We basically framed it in terms of "What are we doing well? What are we doing well that you would like to depend on?" And then we took that and came up with our name and our philosophy, a kind of loose philosophy—it wasn't real hard core, but it was in general what we wanted.

There wasn't any stated director then, but I was a major person making it happen. And then last year, Arthur [Foresta, the principal] gave us actual support in terms of time. The way he did the scheduling, he offered our program two prep periods a week, which wasn't a lot of time to do anything, but it was enough separate time to actually think about the program.

Joan Churney [a kindergarten teacher] and I were doing a lot of the thinking about the teachers and the program and where it was going, but we wanted to share leadership. So last year we rotated who got those two prep periods amongst the whole staff, and everyone took turns chairing meetings. But it ended up that Joan and I were actually the people who were doing the global thinking. So the effort to share leadership worked in terms of who was running meetings, but it didn't work in terms of who was thinking more broadly.

And then at the end of the year, we had to decide who was going to be the director for this year. Arthur was offering us five preps per week, which is not a major amount of time, but it is something. So we went through a big process at the end of last year where we actually tried to put everyone forth as being a director. We tried to use the process we would use with the kids for ourselves—trying to have everyone say what their strengths were and what strengths we thought other people had and then where we thought people needed support. We spent several meetings on that until we hashed out how we wanted to use this time, and we actually came out with splitting the time between myself and Lorna Justice.

The point of that was, we wanted to use two of the preps a week for parent development and the other three for things like administration and coordination. So I took three a week—I had those on Wednesdays afternoons. I put them all together, so Wednesdays, from lunch until the end of the day, were my time for CLC—although of course that didn't always happen.

We wanted to share the whole thing with parents, and we wanted Lorna to specifically target African American and Latino parents—to find a forum to bring their voices in. We had a Caucasian middle-class voice—they were ready to say what they wanted every minute, but they were only a small percent of our program.

This year basically is my first official year as leader of the program, along with Lorna. Recently, in the last month, we went through a director search process where we had a committee of parents and teachers screening—well, actually, we only had two candidates—but looking at resumes and interviewing and putting forth the recommendations. I emerged as the leader for next year, which will be our first with a full-time director. You have no idea what that means.

Would you characterize the school now as a place where parents feel an ownership of their children's educational path?

The original vision was for smaller communities and I think part of it is to give people a voice. I kind of think of it in terms of a potluck. You could never hold a potluck with 800 families. It just wouldn't work. But we have 225 students, and we call a potluck and there's 100 adults and 50 children and it's great. Everyone feels like they belong, and with the sense of community that's developed, we actually can take on educational issues.

For the parents, the feeling of "them" starts to go away—that the school is doing this to them or they're victims in the school. Instead, they're feeling like participants in the school, and I think that's the key to it.

I think a mistake that is made in the system is that they might look at a place like P.S. 261 nine years later and say, "Oh, how interesting a principal with three small schools and three teacher-leaders. Well, there's that school failing out in Staten Island, and why don't we just do that for September? Why don't we just tell them to make three schools by September?" Unfortunately, some very powerful people talk that way. They have no real sense of growth, of what it means to change and grow.

That's another thing the collaboration, the conversation, helps with getting past that isolation. The culture of schools in general is you're very, very isolated. When teachers actually can get together and talk to each other, boom, things take off.

But it depends which parents you're talking about. Our school is unique in that it's not only multiracial, it's multiclassed. By and large, I think most schools in the country are pretty much segregated by class, and the middle class ends up a certain place and poor kids end up somewhere else. At our school, there is a mixture, and I think that makes it very dynamic and very exciting and produces a tremendous possibility for the children, but we're not actually sure how to do it.

It really gets tricky. By and large, the middle class families feel completely confident that the school is theirs, regardless of their race: that would be Latino, African American, or Caucasian. It's more of a class issue. A lot of the working class families seem to trust us a lot, but their attitude toward the school seems to be a little different. It seems to be more like, "Take care of it; that's your job. I go to my job every day, and your job is to take care of the school." Even if the opportunities are there, they don't seem to want to come in on school decisions. It's not that they don't care, but they just trust us to do it.

Is that the way it's always been—or is it a result of the new schools that they trust you to handle it?

It's partly new, because there used be an undercurrent of bad energy when it was just the gifted program and the New Program. There was a kind of serious underpinning with some parents about how the school is racist and that they were losing the neighborhood school—that Caucasian people were taking over the neighborhood school. And that's one of the reasons we tried to tap into that voice. We wanted that voice to be loud; we didn't want that voice to be in the background.

So when we had Lorna working this year, one of the things she did was set up these morning teas that went from 8:00 to 9:30 with no agenda—just drop in and let's chat. The communications were a little bit more open there. Then she would give us feedback at our staff meetings.

How are the relationships between parents and their children's classroom teachers?

What happens in the classroom seems to be a more manageable situation. It doesn't seem to be as intimidating for parents as dealing with the administration. Families figure out a way to communicate with a teacher, and teachers figure out a way to bond with the parents. So, for example, when parent/teacher conferences happen, most of us pretty much see all the parents. And if sometimes we have to go after them, we understand that that's just part of what you do—you don't just let them fade out; you go after them and say, "Listen, I really need to talk to you."

A lot of us also interview parents at the beginning of the year. We call and ask for an interview, just to say, "Listen, you've known your child for five or six years; we've only known them for a month. What can you tell us to help us?" That seems to really change the dynamics a lot, that right off the bat we're honoring what parents want to tell us about their kids. And it builds up trust for later on when maybe we need to say, "Well, we think there's an issue here." We're able to say that because it's not our first conversation with the parents, and we've already established some kind of dialogue about the child on a very positive note. It really seems to help.

We've noticed the parents getting involved on different levels. For some families, making sure that homework is done and that clothes are clean and breakfast is fed is a big contribution, and that's how they feel that they're helping their child in the school. Other families want to actually come and work in the classroom, and that avenue's open to them—but they would never think of wanting to participate in some kind of governance. And we've got other parents who want to work on committees in terms of scrounging up materials or getting a social event together. And then we've some parents who specifically want to work on governance, but you would never actually see those parents working in classrooms. We're working hard to establish different levels of participation.

How much of the original vision for the school would you say has been realized? Have there been some major elements that have had to be reworked or even scrapped, or some new ones introduced?

Actually, when I first got to the school five years ago, one of the reasons I chose to work here is that they were talking about mini-schools. They already had the gifted program and then they'd added the New Program. The inroads were there. Arthur supported the New Program as a kind of model of what he wanted for the rest of the school. That was how he was showing people what he wanted, in a sense.

The year I walked in, Arthur was saying, "Give me your proposals for mini-schools. What do you guys want to do?" Staff people actually got together, and there was a lively debate that whole year about how we would divide up the school. It was actually a very good discussion, but in the end things didn't really happen and I'm not sure why. But that was like the first effort at having it happen, and then after that was when the CLC formed; and then when we formed, it kind of forced the hand of the MLC.

The situation we're in now, from my perspective, is that there's actually still some kind of favoritism because of our history. The New Program has all staff that they've selected, that want to be there, whereas with the CLC and the MLC it's slightly different—because of the way we incorporated, people kind of had to join.

There's also a demographic issue. The gifted program is almost 99 percent Caucasian and 100 percent middle class; the New Program is, officially on paper, two-thirds middle class, but it's multiracial by design. CLC is one-third middle class, and multiracial—I don't want to say by coincidence; we grant variances to out-of-neighborhood Caucasian kids in order to integrate the program. MLC is, I think, 5 percent middle class. So there's still this restructuring going on in a positive direction, but we're kind of stuck in some ways.

I'm not really sure how to evolve. Part of the thing is that when discussions about enrollment come up, the situation is that the New Program has its whole enrollment thing in the beginning of May. Its enrollment is over and done with before everyone else—and the families that are together enough to enroll then happen to be middle class, and that's what slants that program. Then we, in the CLC, have some registration in May, but we have the bulk of our students come in September from the neighborhood, and those are the families that haven't gotten it together to know what they want to do with their kids a year ahead of time. It's been hard for the New Program to think about their role in the school as a whole. For them, it's really important that the parents choose their school, but a lot of parents aren't choosing any school and they're ending up in the CLC. We eventually want the New Program and the CLC to have the same demographics—we both want to be neighborhood programs, but it's not happening right now.

So that's one of the things that we're trying to figure out. The other place where there's a little bit of friction is between the

MLC and the CLC. The CLC tends to be much more progressive in the sense it's more child-centered. The staff tends to be younger and more up on current pedagogy, whereas the MLC is mostly older teachers who tend to be more traditional. So there isn't much articulation between the two schools, and we've sent families who are very empowered into that school [MLC] and then they're kind of put on hold.

This year there are actually major, major breakthroughs with the third-grade class. I think that it might have been our first group of middle-class families that we've sent into that school. They were very respectful and making overtures all year long about "How can we help? How can we help?" and they were put on hold, put on hold, put on hold—and then finally there was a breakthrough where they started having morning meetings. I'm not really sure what happened, but the director of that program said, "Okay, I'll meet with you," and then they started monthly morning meetings where the director and the parents were talking together.

Some things are working well. It's amazing to bring this demographic group of people together. When we bring their children together, we're bringing the families together as well—and that's incredible. In one of the first meetings that I had with my families this year—we have like a curriculum night—I talked for a while about play dates. That's when kids go home together after school or play in the park together. One of the things we first started to notice a couple of years ago is that if we didn't intervene at all, most of the Latino kids would hang out with Latino kids, and African Americans with African Americans, and most of the Caucasians with Caucasians. So this year, I dealt with it head on. I said, "Listen, if you do not intervene, if you do not go after people, all we're doing is replicating the way society is, and that is not what we're trying to do. We're trying to actually change things"—and it worked out great. Letting parents know that here was a place where they could actually make a difference, made a great big difference.

The way the parents have become involved and the way that the teachers have become involved with each other makes what's happening at our school completely different. What makes the difference is our commitment. You can't be—although some people will try—you can't be a disaffected teacher in our school. You can't be someone who just punches the clock, because that's not what the culture is. That fact benefits every child in the building.

The other thing is just the content of our conversation—the staff has regular meetings together where we're talking about education. It's remarkable how rarely most teachers actually talk about what they're doing with the children. That's not part of the teaching culture in New York City; it's kind of a close-the-door sort of thing. I've worked at many schools where the staff never talked about education. When they do, things change completely. It's kind of a culture of professional development that's ongoing and that makes a difference to everyone in the building.

Teaching can be very, very oppressive. You can't go to the bathroom. You can't use the phone. You have to eat in a certain amount of time, and it's horrible. If you think about other people's jobs—like most of my friends, they meet other friends for lunch. Teachers can't do that because you're locked in geographically and you have to be back in 50 minutes, exactly! If you're a minute late, your kids are standing there waiting. You can't get personal calls at work. I mean, I know people who work on computers and they call their friends at work. They can make travel reservations at work. You can't do any of these things at school. The environment is very oppressive and people are locked into their classrooms—it's pretty much one adult and 25 kids for most of the day. It wears people down.

That's another thing the collaboration, the conversation, helps with—getting past that isolation. The culture of schools in general is you're very, very isolated. When teachers actually can get together and talk to each other, boom, things take off. They love it. Give teachers time to talk with each other and things will happen. A lot of the work is just in getting the conversation started, getting people to start talking about what they're doing. It's kind of like a safety issue: how do you make it safe so people will talk about what they're doing? And then the next step is to try to come up with a common language—we're still actually not there yet, at that common language which you need to build a vision.

We're all—teachers and parents—still framing things. We all know what school was like when we went to school. We know in general what public schools are like now—and it's really hard to get into a mind-set of what they could be. That's the hardest jump for people to make. It comes up over and over again when we talk about how to spend money, or as a staff, how do we want to do this and how do we want to do that. It's thinking beyond what exists now; it's that dreaming part of it. Let's pretend like the barriers aren't there right now. What could we have for our children? What do we really want for our children?

PARENT: BILLY HOLIDAY

Billy Holiday, a longtime Brooklyn resident, has been involved with P.S. 261 since 1990. Until her son graduated from the school a week before this interview took place, she was co-chair of the steering committee for the New Program and represented the program on the Center for Collaborative Education's board of directors. She also works for the Brooklyn Exploratory Network, part of the New York Networks for School Renewal, a group funded by the Annenberg Foundation. Three of the small schools at 261—the CLC, MLC, and the New Program—are members of the network.

How did the New Program get started?

It is my understanding that when Arthur [Foresta, the principal] came to the school, it was a very segregated school. They had the gifted program, which was almost entirely white and largely from outside the neighborhood, and then you had the rest of the school, which was almost entirely children of color and was a neighborhood school.

To some extent, the New Program was created in reaction to that. When you look at the original documents for the New Program, the emphasis is on goals for racial balance. They mix kids by lottery. Originally, there was one lottery for blacks, one for Latinos, and one for whites. It's been modified since then: the Arabic community in the zone has grown. So a large percentage of the program was a reaction against the racial segregation in the school.

In the fall of 1992, the New Program went to mixed grades—first and second together and then third and fourth together. It is a completely heterogeneous mix. In each classroom, they try to get racial and gender balance, and academic range balance. It was going to start a year earlier. The staff thought it had reached a consensus with a group of parents, and then it turned out that the group of parents that it had reached the consensus with was very small, and the broader group of parents did not want to do this and there was a lot of concern. So it was delayed a year.

So these mixed classes are an attempt to give the second graders a little bit of a leg up on third grade?

No. I think it was an attempt to focus on the individual children more by breaking assumptions, like assumptions about "this is what second graders should do." When you've got a mix, then you start focusing on what each kid needs to do. It also helps with some social things because the New Program is so small. If the grades weren't mixed, you'd have the same group of kids moving on up together, and classroom patterns would get fixed because, say, Johnny hid under the table in kindergarten.

So it created a much more fluid situation socially with the kids, and academically —with the kids and with the teachers. Teachers began developing two-year curriculum cycles, and a lot of the teachers know the kids much better and the parents much better. I'd like to say that parent/teacher conferences the second year are different or better. The school year gets off much quicker because half the kids in the class know the teacher, know the routines, know the room, the layout, and everything else. They socialize the others. Three days into the school year, you're talking about curriculum, not where do you keep the pencils.

It would appear that there has been this sort of invisible wall that has been built over the years between the classroom door and parents. From what I gather, this is generally the result of the fact that the teachers don't feel very empowered—and where they do feel empowered is in their classrooms, and one of the last things they want to do is have a parent come into the classroom and tell them how they should be doing something, because parents are not educators.

The other thing is just the content of our conversation—the staff has regular meetings together where we're talking about education. It's remarkable how rarely most teachers actually talk about what they're doing with the children. That's not part of the teaching culture in New York City; it's kind of a close-the-door sort of thing. I've worked at many schools where the staff never talked about education. When they do, things change completely. It's kind of a culture of professional development that's ongoing and that makes a difference to everyone in the building.

Also, sixth grade was dropped from the New Program. Basically, it was not a program decision; it was the parents who began pulling their kids out after the fifth grade to schools that were very attractive. District 15 schools were not so attractive, people felt. A lot of people were going out of district, and it got to be four and five kids staying for sixth grade. It got to be that you couldn't really maintain a five-six classroom because the sixth grade was so small.

This last year, we had to reflect on the past and the structure for the future, and we sort of said, well, it's just going to be kindergarten–5th grade; we're not going to attempt to have a sixth grade. Always in the past we had said we wanted sixth grade.

There's a class and racial division in who stays and who leaves. Most of the black and white kids leave. Most of the Latino kids stay. But it's not 100 percent. That tends to be the class line in the New Program. The black and white population is more middle class—more professionals—and the Latino population is working class.

In general, would you say that the small schools at 261 have helped poor, minority children to do better?

Yes, but some places more than others. I think some of the school organizations on the campus have that mission more at the center than others. At the New Program, there's been a continuing discussion about whether there is creaming going on and what is the ethical thing to do about that.

You know, you have to apply to the New Program. You fill out an application—just your name, address; it's a nothing application. But you have to ask for it and fill it out. That has created a division between people who just show up at the school and people who know about the New Program and ask for the application. People have been concerned about that issue. The Children's Learning Cooperative has certainly helped get more of those kids inside, although they only go from kindergarten–2nd grade, so it's incomplete.

If you talk about what the school was like ten years ago, before it started dividing into small schools, yes, it's servicing those students better. Higher expectations have been put out there for them; there's more support. There's clear communication to them that they can learn, that they should be learning, and that they can be school people.

But maybe against some feeling about where we should be, we always say that we're not doing enough. I think everyone feels that. You know, how are we going to take that message about high expectations to Latina girls? People are concerned about that, and I think they're also somewhat concerned about the Arab students, also along gender lines. But you know those are concerns; you can talk about them.

Do you think that P.S. 261 has set up through the small schools the kind of environment where parents can feel a sense of ownership?

I think there's more ownership than there used to be, but it's a constant issue. Parents are not insiders and they're not outsiders. Most decisions take place away from parents. Teachers are very powerful from the parents' point of view. I think that in general, yes, smallness is a key, because

you have to be a working group. We have very high turnout. There are about 175 families and about 200 kids, and we've had several parent meetings of more than 30, 35 people. We had two parent meetings with 50 people. Our small meetings where we shrink down—and you always have some months where you don't get very many people—are like 10 or 12 people. Now, there are schools of 700 that if they get 10 or 12 people for a PTA meeting, they are not unhappy. And, here, everybody knows every teacher. You can get all the teachers together in the room—sometimes all seven teachers can come to us during a committee meeting, and an issue is discussed, and everyone says okay, and that's that.

There's still a long way to go. I mean you have meetings at the school, so there are opportunities. And there are some discussions among parents. But the more structure you could put into the parent organizing, the more helpful that would be.

You've obviously been very involved in P.S. 261. What would you say has been your proudest moment?

That's hard—my proudest moment? I think it's this: the kids gather at the playground in the morning, the older kids. The teachers have stopped going down to pick them up. They line up—the assistant principal is down there, and she announces when it's time to line up. And then she calls them and says, "Class so and so, go. Class so and so, go." And they go in.

I watched that. I remember watching that in the fall, and the kids were just feeling strong and knowing what they should do and doing it, and the teachers were waiting for them in the classrooms, and they weren't being policed and they didn't need to be policed. They'd internalized what they needed to do, how to be safe with each other, and how to play and have fun, and then how to line up and go into school. And I thought: "Oh God, I'm glad my son is here. I'm glad he doesn't start his day with people yelling at him and saying, 'line up!' And he starts his day in a nice way—I mean, I yell at him in the morning, but it's just me; that doesn't matter because I yell so nice. So I was very proud that he went to a school that respected him enough to do that. They had taught the kids how to be self-sufficient; they were communicating the right message.

PARENT: MICHAEL HOPPER

Michael Hopper's background is in theater and music, and more recently, he owned a small business. His son, David, entered the Children's Learning Cooperative at P.S. 261 in kindergarten and completed first grade two days before this interview took place.

How did you happen to send your son to 261?

P.S. 261 is not the school we were zoned for—and I think that's kind of an important thing. Our house is zoned for P.S. 29. We actually had to file for a variance. We decided that after attending some of the open houses at schools. At the open house I went to at 261, Mark [Buswinka, teacher-director of the CLC] was giving a presentation along with Joan Churney [a kindergarten teacher]. And it was that presentation, frankly, that really sold us on David going to 261, because he was coming from a day-care center he had been in for three and a half years that had a very similar kind of feel to it. I wanted that kind of thing to carry on because I thought it was a good environment. And 29's a more rigid, traditional kind of school.

The year before my son started here was when the teachers began to really focus on kindergarten and first and second grade, and they asked the parents to get involved. So when I came in at kindergarten time, I heard that there was a meeting of the parents and I went to that and I started getting involved. I think it was a potluck dinner where someone came to me and asked me if I wanted to become somebody in management. Somebody was leaving because he had a problem with the philosophy of the CLC—this guy didn't think that a dual language program and the special education people should be part of the CLC. He just said, "I'm going to keep sending my child here, but I'm not going to get involved in it."

I couldn't devote the time to management then, but I stayed involved. I came to all of the parent meetings, and ultimately by the end of the year I was very involved in a couple of things in school-based management. Then I was elected as an alternate in school-based management for this year. There's a representative from each of the programs and then there are alternates. We were able to elect up to two alternates from each program. I don't know if every program did it, but CLC did it and I'm one of the alternates. I'm also one of the co-directors for the parents' organization.

How would you describe the dynamics between faculty and parents over the two years that you have been here?

Basically, the teachers came to the parents and said, "We want you to be involved —the way a small school becomes really successful is to have parents involved with teachers in the organization of the school."

The teachers really do need parents in a supportive role on all levels. As a result of that, I think the teachers have been generally quite open to the parent involvement, though some more than others, because it is a new thing. For me, it's been great. Joan Churney was David's kindergarten teacher, and she was very open. You could come in any time and speak to her about anything. And she would come and ask for things that she needed in the way of help—either just for items for the classroom or for organizing things. And I've spent a lot of time with Mark this year, not only as a teacher, but as coordinator of the teachers in the whole program. So it's been a very open thing.

I do think that there are teachers who are apprehensive about this, because in the talks that I've had with teachers and other people who are involved with education, it would appear that there has been this sort of invisible wall that has been built over the years between the classroom door and parents. From what I gather, this is generally the result of the fact that the teachers don't feel very empowered—and where they do feel empowered is in their classrooms, and one of the last things they want to do is have a parent come into the classroom and tell them how they should be doing something, because parents are not educators.

I think that it's an area that everybody needs to work on. I mean, even myself: I recognize the fact that I'm not an educator. I don't have training in that area, and I do appreciate the fact that it takes training and a lot of work and devotion to do that. I wouldn't presume to just waltz into a classroom and tell a teacher what to do, first of all.

It also creates a certain level of intimidation, because you don't know where you might be stepping on someone's toes. I think this communication can be opened up, but I think it's tough, and I think that it's especially tough for teachers. They're under such pressure—especially when funds are scarce and you don't know whether you're even going to have what you consider to be the basic tools to teach. I mean, when you get a list at the beginning of the year and teachers are asking you to make sure that your child comes in with two boxes of pencils and markers, and this, that, and the other thing, you're kind of like, "What? Hello? What's going on? What is going on here?" You hear that every teacher gets a certain amount of money to go out and buy supplies, and you think, "Oh, that's a good idea!" and then you hear it's $100 for the entire year. One of the things I realized early on is that the school needs so much support that you could give up your life to them and it wouldn't be enough. You could spend every waking moment helping at the school in some way or fashion, seven days a week, and it wouldn't be enough.

How much would you say that the vision for the school, as you understand it, has been realized?

Well, I think that the vision is beginning to be realized, and I think that it comes in stages. I mean it starts out with the teachers talking about it and then it progresses to getting the parents involved and then it gets to teachers finding a sympathetic ear with administration, which they get with our school. That sympathetic ear lets the teachers spend more time together planning things, and they figure out how to do that when they're doing scheduling, so the teachers do get time together during the day. That's something they did this year.

Then the teachers decided that they needed two people to help them work on getting things organized. So they got Mark working with the teachers, and another teacher working with the parents. Mark is teaching as well as trying to help organize the school. It's got to be an extremely draining process. It takes an enormous amount of listening, board meetings, and thinking about everybody's demands and trying to fit them into the real world. It just takes a total, complete immersion and commitment. I mean, I've owned my own businesses all my life, and to me, this is sort of like owning a small business. People who own small businesses work seven days a week, even when they're home on Saturdays and Sundays. You have to be totally committed to it. It's all you think about.

So, yes, I think the vision is being realized. We started out with teachers, involved parents, we got the administration, we went to the district, we got that okayed, we selected a director through a process involving parents, we selected teachers through a process involving parents and teachers, so we're working as a unit. A lot happened this year. Next year, with some planning, a lot more will happen.

Already, the parents are talking about next year. We're going to be publishing a newsletter during the summer—which nobody else is doing, from what I understand. We're going to put together an information package that is actually handed out to every parent on the first day. We're trying to get more and more parents involved, because we need a larger parent organization.

We want to get everybody more enthused and more involved. This year, in an effort to advise the parents of C.I.C. about what was going on in the school, we had a huge potluck dinner. We provided entertainment for the kids in a separate location, so there was child care. We had the largest turnout of parents that Arthur [Foresta] has ever seen. We had people translating for Spanish families; we had translators for Arab families. It was a huge, huge success. We're going to attempt to start off the year with that sort of a thing so that we can get more and more people aware of what's going on and how they can help the school. Basically, the more people there are, the less each person has to do. You don't have to commit yourself like I may have, but what you can do and will do will make a huge difference in the end. It's not a question of people not wanting to; they just have to be made aware of it—because they're part of the generation that just said, "Well, my kid is at school, so that's where he goes to school, see you later." They didn't realize that there's something going on here that they can be a part of.

What makes the difference is our commitment. You can't be—although some people will try—you can't be a disaffected teacher in our school. You can't be someone who just punches the clock, because that's not what the culture is. That fact benefits every child in the building.

CHILDREN: JOSEPH, ROCHELLE, AND MICHAEL

Joseph, Rochelle, and Michael were fourth graders in Ms. Schmidt's class in the MLC program at P.S. 261. Rochelle was nine years old; Joseph and Michael were ten.

What are some of the good things about small schools and what are some of the things that maybe need to be changed?

Rochelle: I've been in a small school before. It was terrible. I came here in second grade. Before that, I was in kindergarten and first grade in Far Rockaway. I didn't really like it there because it was like crowded and it was already little. Some kids were making fun of me and the teacher used to make fun of me. I like this school better because the teacher is nicer, the kids are nicer, and you have fun here. And I have two friends.

Joseph: I've been at this school for four years. I used to go to school up in Hartford, and I didn't like it there because the teachers were mean; they were selfish. They would sometimes make fun of kids. I told my parents that I wanted to change schools. And I picked here and got to like it so far. I've got new friends. Every year I get new friends because some new people come in. Rockelle's been in my class since second grade. Same with Steven. And we've been friends since second grade.

You all were part of CLC first and now you're in MLC. What's the difference between them?

Rochelle: In MLC, we go on a lot of trips. And CLC, they just do kiddie stuff. Because, you know, there's little kids like from kindergarten. There's pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first. Right? And second.

Michael: Yeah, like last year we went on a trip to Washington, D.C.

Rochelle: Yeah, only the MLC went to Washington, D.C.

Michael: They promised us we'd eat lunch with the President, and . . .

Joseph: And we didn't even get to see the President. Cause they felt bad, they took us to a Burger King.

Let me just try to get you to remember when you were in CLC. How did you like it then when you were little?

Michael: I liked it. We got homework but not that much, and it was easy for me to do.

Joseph: And Mark [Buswinka] was our teacher. And he used to do this, remember? in the morning, when we came in, we would play around a little in the classroom, reading a book or something. And then we also had the wall; it was like a reading loft. It went up.

Michael: If something's bothering children, he goes over and he helps them. That's why I like Mark. Because every time when somebody gets hurt, he will help them. And he's fair. He's very fair.

Joseph: Then he said he would teach us Spanish, like to count to ten in Spanish. And the last thing was that he really never had a temper.

Michael: I like the mediation program.

Joseph: They give you sheets, and you have to fill them out. If they think you are good enough, they pick you. There are two days of training. It's very good because they order lunch for you, but, anyway, it helps kids. A few days ago, I had this boy. He just walked up to this other boy and started fighting with him, started chasing him down, and took his shoe, ran outside the school yard, threw it all the way across the street. Came back. Somebody punched him in his mouth. He cut his lip. It opened with his ring.

Michael: Which one? The one that had the shoe, or the one that didn't?

Joseph: I don't know. And then the boy because we have to bring him to the principal if it's serious—I took him. Then he started trying to get away from me. He started kicking me. He kicked me in the stomach. We took him right into the principal, and the principal really helped he really solved it out. He made them very calm and friends again in like ten minutes. I don't want to give out anybody's name.

Michael: Yeah. You're not supposed to discuss it.

Rochelle: I was going to be in mediation but there were certain questions that you had to answer on the sheet. If they thought that your answers were very good, they would pick you. But I don't think I was going to be a very good mediator because I couldn't think of anything to say on the questions.

Can the Odds Be Changed?[1]

by Deborah Meier

One-of-a-kind schools flicker brightly. A few manage to survive by avoiding the public's attention or by serving powerful constituents; the rest gradually burn out. Ms. Meier wonders whether we can change that and make the exceptions the norm.

There are numerous stories of schools that have been successful with students who would otherwise count among society's failures. However, such school successes rarely set the stage for Big Reform agendas. These one-of-a-kind schools flicker brightly. A few manage to survive by avoiding the public's attention or by serving powerful constituents; the rest gradually burn out. Can we change that? Can we make the exceptions the norm?

THE SEARCH FOR SILVER BULLETS

To the vast majority of serious policy makers, the existing exemplary schools offer no important lessons. Most policy makers define *systemic* so that it applies only to the kinds of solutions that can be more or less simultaneously prescribed for all schools, irrespective of particulars. Solutions, in short, that seek to improve schooling by taking away the already too limited formal powers of those closest to the students. Examples range from more prescriptive curricula to new, more centralized testing systems; fiscal rewards and penalties; or changed school governance bodies.

School-level folks are as skeptical about the capacity of any of these top-down recipes to make a significant impact on the minds of teachers or children as policy-level folks are about the idiosyncratic bottom-up ones. Practitioners—in classrooms and central offices—know at heart that "this too shall pass" or can be gotten around or overcome. They wait out the innovators. Policy makers work overtime to come up with ways to circumvent such resistance. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

This is a climate that encourages impatience: enough's enough! If we can't do a better job of marrying top-down and bottom-up reform, we're probably in for big trouble. Giving up on the new thought that all children can learn to use their minds well is hard, especially for those of us who know firsthand that schools as designed are hardly suited to the job and that vastly more children could be well-educated if we came up with a better design. We've "tasted" it. It seems both so near and so far. Perhaps if we posed the problem differently, the oddball schools might offer us systemic answers. The Annenberg Challenge gave a substantial boost to a wave of projects around the country that were, on the one hand, fueled by the

[1] This is a reprint of an article originally published in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1998.

growing interest in vouchers and charters but that sought on the other hand a response more compatible with public education and equity concerns. By seeking a solution to the systemic through looking at the particular, different possibilities became thinkable.

Good schools are filled with particulars—including particular human beings. And it is these human beings that lie at their heart, that explain their surprising successes. In fact, it is these particulars that inspire the passions of those involved and draw upon the best in each. Rather than ignore such schools because their solutions lie in unreplicable individuals or circumstances, it's precisely such unreplicability that should be celebrated. Maybe what these "special" schools demonstrate is that *every school must have the power and the responsibility to select and design its own particulars* and thus to surround all young people with powerful adults who are in a position to act on their behalf in open and publicly responsible ways. That may be the "silver bullet."

Will grown-ups all jump at the chance to be such responsible adults? Of course not. Most have never been asked to have their own wonderful ideas, much less to take responsibility for them. Many will be leery because along with the freedom to design their own particulars must come new responsibilities for defending the outcomes. But the resultant practice, responsible citizenship, is not only a good means for running a good school but also the central aim of public schooling. How convenient.

In designing a way to make it easier to invent powerful and responsible schools, we can stack the deck in favor of good schooling, so that great schools are more likely, good schools become ordinary practice, and poor schools are more quickly exposed and dealt with. This effort will require us to learn how to make judgments about schools with standards in mind, but not with a standardized ruler in hand. For too long we've acted as though, in the name of standards, we have to treat students and teachers as interchangeable parts. Nothing could be worse for standards and nothing would be more unnecessary.

We already know some of the common features of exemplary schools—public or private—that serve ordinary and extraordinary children well. For example:

Smallness. It helps if schools are of a reasonable size, small enough for faculty members to sit around a table and iron things (such as standards) out, for everyone to be known well by everyone else, and for schools and families to collaborate face-to-face over time. Small enough so that children belong to the same community as the adults in their lives instead of being abandoned in adultless subcultures. Small enough to both feel safe and be safe. Small enough so that phony data can easily be detected by any interested participant. Small enough so that the people most involved can never say they weren't consulted.

Self-governance. It helps if those most directly involved have sufficient autonomy over critical decisions. Only then will it be fair to hold people accountable for the impact of their decisions. This will entail creating democratic adult communities that have the power to make decisions about staffing, leadership, and the full use of their budget, as well as about the particulars of scheduling, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

Choice. It helps if there are sufficient choices available for parents, students, and teachers so that schools can afford to be different from one another—to have their own definite characters, special emphases, and styles of operating that appeal to some but not all. Responsibility flows more naturally from willing and informed parties. (If schools are small, they can share big old buildings, and choices can be easily available.)

These three qualities—schools that are small enough in size, sufficiently self-governing, and self-chosen—offer a good beginning. They won't in themselves solve anything, although together they could help solve everything.

Two different historic endeavors in New York City—the 22-year experiment with schools of choice in District 4 and the Alternative High School Division's 12-year effort that created dozens of small alternatives, came together in the 1990s to challenge "business as usual." These ventures caught the public's fancy, stimulating a movement on behalf of small schools of choice for all ages and types of students. The genie was out of the bottle and hard to put back. The idea of small alternative schools attracted the attention of families who did not see themselves as "at risk." Word of mouth suggested that students in these schools matched their counterparts academically and surpassed them on many critical dimensions: college attendance, work preparedness, and ability to perform socially valued tasks. They were also achieving improved scores on typical academic assessments. The research community gradually confirmed such impressions. The studies suggest that such schools provide for the possibility of a community powerful enough to be compelling to young people—a club worth joining.

The skeptics say it still can't work en masse. Whether we create another 100 or 200 small schools of choice—some starting from scratch, others carved out of existing schools—they can't be built to last. Everyone agrees that, under present circumstances, such schools have a limited future. The reformers argue, however, that "present circumstances" are not engraved in stone.

WHY EXCEPTIONS CAN'T BECOME THE NORM

Without deep-seated changes in the system that surrounds these small schools of choice, history suggests that the critics will be right: most will water down their innovations or give up altogether. As their numbers increase, so, oddly enough, does their vulnerability. This is one case in which there may not be more safety in

numbers. For one thing, these maverick schools tax the capacities of the existing institutions—both the formal system and the godfatherly individuals and organizations that spring up to provide nurturance and cover. Second, as their numbers increase, they're more noticeable. This visibility, in turn, creates new demands to bring them into compliance. Their mainstream counterparts ask why the mavericks are allowed to "get away" with this or that. Who do they think they are? Third, as new roadblocks appear, which require new Herculean responses, school folks begin to complain of weariness—the original fire in the belly that fueled the pioneering spirit begins to wane. Doing the new and the old at the same time seems more and more unfair, an imposition rather than an opportunity.

The existing system is simply not designed to support such oddball entities. It believes in its mission of control and orderliness. The people who operate the present system do not see themselves in the business of trying to best match teacher to job, child to school. Nor could they do so if they wanted. Instead, whenever they look at a problem, they've been trained to seek, first and foremost, ways to solve it by rule. If it's not good for everyone, it's not good for anyone. To make exceptions smacks of favoritism and inefficiency. Each exception must thus be defended over and over again. How else can we hold everyone accountable?

The results of such rule-boundedness are well-documented—above all by such thoughtful critics of public education as John Chubb and Terry Moe. (We all know that the expression "to work to the rule" describes a form of job sabotage.) Except for small enclaves within the large institution, in which special constituencies carve out their own intimate subschools (the ones designed for the top students or for the most vulnerable), the school as a whole remains remarkably anonymous and unchangeable, the model of a nonlearning institution. But there is an alternative. It means changing the "circumstances" so that those three magic bullets described earlier —small, self-governing schools of choice—can be in the mainstream, not on the sidelines, of the system.

If nearly all good schools in the private sector share these three characteristics, why can't we offer them publicly for all children? Because, it's said, it's not politically feasible when public monies are at stake. If that's the nub of the argument, then we should either roll over and admit defeat or *make* it politically feasible. That means inventing a system of accountability for public funds and aiming for educational results that don't require bad educational practice. It's as simple—and every bit as hard—as that.

CHANGING THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Small, self-governing schools of choice could be encouraged to flourish, grow like Topsy, spread like weeds, if we built our system *for them*, not them for our system. To create highly personalized schools, however, we have to be willing to shift both our practices and our mindset cautiously and relentlessly over many years. Present

practice isn't inevitable. What we have, after all, is a human invention that's only a hundred years old. But just because it's one of those newfangled ideas that doesn't work doesn't mean it will fade away naturally. In fact, it's got a tenacious hold. But our current practice is not the inevitable product of our human nature. In fact, it's peculiarly in conflict with our humanity and with everything we know about rearing the young.

Until the *relationships* between all the people—parents and teachers—responsible for raising our children are changed, changing the parts (curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment) won't matter very much. But it's precisely because, in the long run, these professional "details" matter a great deal that we need to create a system of schooling that allows us to spend our time and energy honing them, close to home. As Theodore Sizer wisely said when Central Park East Secondary School was started, "Keep it simple, so that you can focus on what will always remain complex —the mind of each individual learner and the subject matter we're trying to help her master." Schools have been doing the reverse for far too long.

We shouldn't declare all schools independent tomorrow. We shouldn't remove all rules and regulations by fiat. We shouldn't even downsize all schools by fiat. Until we have more parents clamoring for change, more teachers with the skill and confidence to try out new approaches, and more living examples of schools that are both independent and accountable, we need to keep our ambitions in check. We're aiming at a change that sticks, not another fad.

On the immediate agenda, for example, is creating a series of large-scale pilot "laboratories" to see how it might work if we let the existing idiosyncratic schools, with their already eager stalwarts, officially break loose and be different. Add to them all those interested in starting new schools to replace the worst of our current enterprises. Then we'll need a lean master contract between these schools, the union, the city, and the state—a contract covering the most basic obligations as well as those unwaivable local, state, and federal rules pertaining to health, safety, and equity. If those on the sidelines can sit back and watch, not rush in, as the pioneers develop their own answers—including mistaken ones—then we'll learn something. The present system of schooling and accountability is chock-full of mistakes, after all, not to mention disasters that are perpetuated year after year. Of course we're accustomed to them, so we barely notice. This time, let's notice the mistakes and the disasters—with equal charity. As a way of noticing, let's honor forms of accountability that support rather than sabotage the very qualities such independence is trying to achieve: accountability through the responsible exercise of collective human judgment.

The "magic" three—smallness, self-governance, and choice—provide some of the necessary basic ingredients for more responsible individual schools and thus for more accountability. Smallness creates self-knowledge, self-governance allows for a

range of voices now often missing, and choice permits disgruntled parents and teachers to vote with their feet. But while these three elements appear to undercut some of the pressure for more and more external accountability, there's a strong argument for adding several other ingredients that will support the development of a more responsible community of schools. Not just because it's politically smart—but because without a powerful system of public accountability, good individual schools can too easily become stuck in routines, parochial, smug, and secretive. Even tyrannical. Smallness, for example makes it harder to hide from the impact of bad leadership as well as good leadership.

There are several forms of public accountability that are not only compatible with but actually supportive of school-based initiatives. One way to improve the odds, compatible with the three magic bullets, is to increase constituents' voices about the work not only of their own schools but also of other people's schools in terms of student outcomes, equity, and fiscal integrity. Experience suggests that networks of schools can offer us an opportunity to have the best of both worlds: individuality and close external accountability. We need ways to hold schools up to a mirror and ask, "Is this what you meant to be doing?" We need to tackle professional myopia and defensiveness. We assume that schoolchildren learn by being exposed to criticism, but we have not transferred that to the way teachers and schools learn. For this to happen, we need to create instruments that are consistent with the very quality that led us to propose small schools in the first place: responsiveness to often nonstandard ways of maintaining high standards. What strong democratic schooling needs are new forms of horizontal accountability focused on the collective work of the school.

The first step involves creating stronger internal accountability systems, such as those pioneered at Central Park East Secondary School, Urban Academy, University Heights, and International High School, which uses both peers and external critics —college faculty members, parents, community members, and other high school teachers—to examine their students' work. It's the job of the teachers, for example, to grade their own students and to determine when they meet schoolwide standards—a task too few schools take seriously today. But the teachers, in turn, need to be publicly accountable for such judgments—both to their internal constituents and to the larger public.

At the next step, schools must answer to one another for the quality of their work. Through the creation of networks of sister schools, not uncommon in private schooling, we can learn how to look at one another's work as critical friends. Such networks can also serve to make up for any problems of scale, if schools choose to use them in that way. Schools that provide feedback on the work of sister schools are creating built-in professional development tools, as well as a powerful form of parent and community education. There is nothing better for one's own learning curve than to formally observe and give support to others.

Third, networks need "cooler," noncollegial audiences to answer to. For this we need formal review panels—public auditors—composed of both critical friends and more distanced and skeptical publics, to attest to the credibility of the networks and the work of their schools. It is such bodies that must demand convincing evidence that the network of schools under review is doing its job, is on the right track, and is acting responsibly. Such review panels must ultimately be responsible to the larger, democratically chosen public authorities.

And finally, everyone—teachers, parents, assessors, legislators, and the public—needs a shared body of credible information (actual student work as well as statistical data) as evidence on which to build reflections and judgments. These are the essentials for creating public credibility, but they are also the essentials for producing good schools. The task of these varied groups of observers—the school's immediate community, the networkers, and the external review panels—is not to find the "one right answer" but to push those closest to the action to act with greater enlightenment.

This is no idle dream. In New York City in 1995, with the support of funds from the Annenberg Challenge, nearly 100 small schools broke themselves down into more than 20 such self-chosen networks and began the work of shared support and accountability. More of these schools were in the works within a year. Simultaneously, a system of review panels to accredit such networks and to maintain audits of their work was being developed, as was a system for collecting credible and accessible data. In return, both the union and the city agreed to negotiate new freedoms and greater flexibility. The largest city in the land was on the brink of the biggest experiment on the potential of smallness. But New York City's inability to keep the same chancellor for more than a few years soon put the more risky and experimental aspects of the project on the back burner.

On a smaller scale, also with support from Annenberg, Boston launched a similar approach—called pilot schools—and throughout the country at other Annenberg sites comparable efforts were begun. Not surprisingly, system folks are always tempted by apparently easier solutions that do not change the locus of power and are simpler to implement—at least on paper.

We periodically imagine that we can avoid the messiness of human judgments and create a foolproof "automatic" system to make everyone good or smart or intelligent. At least, we pretend to believe it is possible. Then we get upset at the bureaucracy it inevitably spawns. But if juries of our peers will do for deciding life-and-death matters of law, why not juries of our peers to decide life-and-death matters of education? As Winston Churchill once said about democracy itself, nothing could be more flawed—except all the alternatives. Of course, juries need guidelines, a body of precedents, rules of procedure, evidence, and the requirement to reach a publicly shared decision. This will not come easily or overnight, and, like democ-

racy itself, such an approach rests on restoring levels of mutual trust we seem inclined to abandon together—to our peril.

The criterion we need to keep at the forefront of our minds is clear: How will this or that policy affect the intelligent and responsible behavior of the people closest to the students (as well as the students themselves)? That's the litmus test. Creating forms of governance and accountability that are mindful first and foremost of their impact on effective relationships between teachers, children, and families will not be an easy task. It may not even show up as a blip on next year's test scores. But shortcuts that bypass such relationships are inefficient.

If we do it right, we might in the process help create responsible and caring communities that are more powerful than those adultless subcultures that dominate far too many of our children's lives and that endanger our larger common community. The problem we face is, after all, more than "academic."

REFERENCE

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Marathon High School:

Reflection Grounds Dramatic Restructuring

The following is an excerpt from ***The Five Schools Study: Restructuring Philadelphia's Comprehensive High Schools****, an unflinching report produced by Research for Action for the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) which examines the restructuring efforts of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative (PSC) eight-year reform effort (1988-1995) to "seed and nurture the restructuring of the city's 22 comprehensive high schools..." (Philadelphia Education Fund, p.1)*

While we were only able to excerpt the story of one school profiled within the study—Marathon High School and the tough work of restructuring within that school—we urge anyone interested in the complete study to contact PEF (see Resource List at the end of this volume). The central feature of restructuring was the creation of small learning communities (SLCs)[1] within these large, previously impersonal high schools.

As noted in the study:

> *The five case studies, taken together, provide a sketch of what the big picture of reform looks like over time in five buildings. Stories from inside schools are complicated and these case studies are highly simplified and selective, but they offer a history, a starting point for reflection. Change is not linear, and too often, barriers feel overwhelming and movement impossible. But in fact, reform has moved ahead. The case studies show how and where the monumental efforts of many teachers have pushed reform forward. We see small learning communities (SLCs) beginning to cohere and to offer new incentives for students and teachers to invest in schools. They also show how, too often, all of the requirements for change have been inconsistently present and the many conflicting factors that continue to impede the process (Philadelphia Education Fund, p.86-87).*

Restructuring made a huge turnaround in one year.

Student Enrollment: 3,053
- White: 13%
- African American: 83%
- Latino: 1%
- Asian American: 3%

Students from Low Income Families: 77%

Small Learning Communities: 9
- 6 Home Grown Charters
- 2 Motivation / Magnet
- 1 Academy

Governance Group: Leadership Team

Number of Principals in Period 1988-1995: 2

[The year] "has been hectic, chaotic. I'd like to say exciting but I guess I'd have to hedge on that because I think we started out excited, but the problems mounted and it gave way to frustration. Maybe you could label it growing pains because it was so totally brand new and was widespread and encompassing in a building as large as this one. I guess you have to resign yourself to the fact that there will be bugs that have to be worked out ... I think things will probably run a lot smoother in the coming school year." (Charter Coordinator)

[1] Endnote - See page 102

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"Overall, this [restructuring] has been successful. There has been a huge turnaround in one year. The ideas have been carried out and the charters are working. People are tired but that's because they have been working hard to make it work ... Staff had to rethink, plan, and implement—all at the same time." (Teacher)

"You have to guide the evolutionary nature [of change]." (Principal)

Marathon High School entered restructuring late and dramatically. In 1993, a former teacher at Marathon became principal. He led Marathon into radically decentralizing many school-wide functions to small learning communities, with the belief that tight boundaries of time, space, and student and teacher assignments is the essential first step to building SLCs that work. In addition, he modeled and supported assessment and reflection across the school and within SLCs by creating forums where people could discuss what was happening and revise both vision and strategy where needed.

All year, teachers in preexisting programs worried "that our efforts will be dismantled"

Marathon High School is big and clean. It stands three stories in the shape of a mammoth E in a predominantly white working class community. Floors shine and the tan walls, while dull and institutional, hold little graffiti. Computer banners announce the entrances to individual SLCs, each of which is housed in an arm of the E configuration. In January, there was little other wall decoration. By May, SLCs claimed ownership of halls and doorways by hanging signs and posters that reflected their emerging personalities.

In 1994-95, approximately 2,700 students were enrolled, 1,344 attended school in the main building. Three long standing off-site programs, Social Services, Inspiration, and the Enterprise A Magnet, have been perceived as "siphoning off the best students." Enterprise and Inspiration have provided "safe" off-site campuses for neighborhood Euro-American students. Although 81 percent of the total school's population is African American, only 50 percent of the students in Inspiration and the Enterprise Magnet are black; 100 percent of the School for Social Services is black.

In the fall of 1994, Marathon undertook restructuring of its entire main building into six small learning communities. Although the principal and others articulated the principle of heterogeneity within each SLC, the 1994-1995 school year focused on putting SLCs in place in the main building. All year, teachers in preexisting off-site programs worried "that our efforts will be dismantled." And at a parent meeting in the spring, the principal explained to the racially mixed group that future student assignments to SLCs in the main building and off-site campuses would strive for balance along such dimensions as race, ethnicity, gender, and

achievement level. Several parents argued for not tampering with success. Later, he wondered if this would be the issue that would challenge the authority of his and others' restructuring vision. What was in jeopardy?

The previous year, the principal had involved staff in the restructuring design through activities like identifying their "best hopes and worst fears," surveys, and small group discussions. "Best hopes" included "meet[ing] the needs of all students," "defus[ing] tensions by knowing everyone," and helping students to "become more active learners." "Worst fears" ranged from the concern that restructuring "will be implemented hastily and true goals will be lost" to worry that particular SLCs will "become a dumping ground for a certain group of students and that "competition will be created." These activities laid a strong foundation for change as teachers worked through concerns. A staff member commented on the principal's leadership style and its fit with the school:

> This is a very old fashioned school ... Now we are beginning to get into the 90's. The principal has a vision. He is Peter the Great in that he has to wipe away superstition and tradition ... This is a province.

The principal devolved decision-making and responsibility in dramatic ways.

Teachers put together proposals for small learning communities and staff selected where they wanted to be, but not everyone got their first choice.

> I wrote a proposal ... [and] I did get the charter I wanted but some of the teachers didn't. Maybe because I wrote a proposal he put me in the charter I wanted.

Teachers estimate that about 60 percent of students ended up in an SLC that they chose. Teachers made efforts to describe the SLCs to aid students in their placement decisions. But as one teacher noted, "The question is, is choice meaningful to kids?" Some students saw their choices as delimited or illusory and questioned the point of theme-focused SLCs that lacked essential resources to carry out the theme.

> Before I was in the honors block. They broke that up. They just disregarded us completely. We have no honors choices now. (Student)

> I came to this charter to get into art (or woodshop, music, chorus) but we don't have those classes. (Student)

> If we're in Fitness, we should get more health equipment so that we could get used to it—the kinds of things that we'd be using in the hospital. (Student)

> We should get a chance to work with our hands. So maybe like, bring in a frog or something to dissect so we could get used to it. (Student)

Later in the year, a coordinator described her SLC's plans to make choice more meaningful:

> It was very difficult at first because time wasn't allowed for interviewing the students. So all we were going on were records without getting to the individual and finding our what their interests were ... [This year] we are interviewing every student, but that presents a problem because we have students who do not attend on a regular basis.

Rostering confusion created dissatisfaction.

The principal devolved organizational decision-making and responsibility to newly created SLCs in dramatic ways. Functions such as student discipline, rostering, special education, and purchasing materials and supplies were immediately decentralized. Staff who had served the whole school were assigned to SLCs. Deans and department heads became charter co-coordinators. Special education teachers were assigned to SLCs. This strategy stands in sharp contrast to other schools that have continued to locate many of these functions across the whole school. A central office administrator reviewing the School Improvement Plan gave high praise to Marathon staff assembled to present and defend it: "You're the only school who's decentralizing in this way. This is an exceptional plan." An SLC coordinator explained the principal's strategy:

> Really, this year has been used to get all the organizational things in place so the wheels move in sync, and the instructional end of it has been sacrificed to some extent which, I understand, will be a priority next year.

Speed and drama were not without costs, especially in the early months of change. In December, everyone—particularly SLC coordinators—was reeling from massive change:

> This is the worst I've seen at Marathon. The rostering wasn't set up correctly. They didn't figure on the number of students. There is a lot of chaos.
>
> Right now it seems as if the charter has been cut off without supplies. I don't have enough textbooks for any one class ... None of our duplicating equipment is working.
>
> I think they rushed it [the charters]. They rushed. They should have waited until it was all set up. (Student)

Rostering confusion created dissatisfaction among both teachers and students. Rostering became so problematic that the school moved back to a centralized system with coordinators providing schedules. Students expressed frustration. Seniors sometimes found themselves in SLCs that did not offer the courses that they needed to go to college. It took weeks, sometimes months, to change rosters—when

it was possible to change them at all. "The district shorted us on teachers and 200 students we hadn't expected walked through the doors." Some classes were as large as 50 and "leveling took forever."

In December, students and staff talked about discipline problems, fighting and the potential for violence which they felt loomed over the school.

> The downside of the charters is that unless you monitor them very carefully, charters can become gangs and exhibit ganglike behavior and competitiveness can become rivalry. Once we took note of that, then we began to do something to defuse it.

The principal took steps to "give people something" while they managed the hard work of change. He instituted hall sweeps; began meeting with problematic students and transferring out those who had repeatedly "not behaved as good citizens." But perhaps most importantly, students were asked to help tackle the problem—setting the precedent that reform is in their hands too. Student council planned a series of school-wide activities to remind people "they all belong to Marathon."

How will small learning community identities evolve under the single roof of Marathon High School? Reflecting on decentralization, one teacher looked back and then to the future.

> The bad thing that happened [is the] divisions [among SLCs]. We are reorganiz ing [to be more] like the United States, that is, each charter having its representatives ... We need to establish a relationship between Marathon the school and Marathon the series of charters.

By spring, students and teachers said that the school felt calm. Some seniors, who had earlier voiced the strongest concerns about SLCs, later reflected and gave a positive assessment:

> I think the whole idea is good. At first we were upset, but then we got to like it. (Student)

> In charters, you get to know your teachers better and you make friends. It is more like family. The ninth graders will have a better chance [because they will have been in an SLC for four years.] (Student)

A teacher agreed:

> [The benefit of charters] is with the kids. It's a good point. It used to be that by November you were hoping you'd never see them again. [Now] you get to know them, they get to know you. They feel comfortable and that's a good point.

The principal asked SLCs to explore what community means.

Professional Development

Under Marathon's restructuring plan, SLCs strive to become meaningful sites for teachers' professional development. To support SLC efforts, the principal met with coordinators to share information, problem solve, and plan. He saw these meetings as modeling a process for professional growth and leadership development which coordinators might adopt in their SLCs. He also set whole school priorities which each SLC was left to pursue its own way. For example, he asked that SLCs consider strategies for exploring what community means and how they could nurture it. One SLC took up this charge by conducting a survey of students and teachers and reflecting on the responses.

One new SLC took advantage of partnership to jump start their professional development and SLC coherence. Renaissance was part of PATHS/PRISM's Arts Empower project which funded materials, student trips to cultural events, and an artist-in-residence. The Arts Empower 1994 institute provided precious time in the summer to advance the SLC's community building and thematic planning for the coming year:

> [Arts Empower] has worked well here, I think. We had our theme and we kind of like did variations on this theme of totems as a symbol of self, and since each member of the team had his or her own idea, we kind of let them go with it. So one wanted to do drama, and one wanted to do creative writing, and another wanted to do something with art and writing combined. So we kind of kept our theme as the organizing thread and just allowed everyone to do his own thing and that's worked out well.

But other problems challenged SLCs' early steps toward coherent educational programming:

> I have been in a couple of workshops over the last few summers. Great ideas, plans. When you get back to school, a brick wall. We planned a complete unit for [our program]. When we got back I was teaching ... something entirely different.

> I'm not happy here. I feel like a stranger in a strange land. I'm the only one doing the cooperative learning method. [For the kids] it's too loose. They go wild with it. They get the feeling they can talk their way out of projects. They're not used to the freedom or the autonomy.

Without the links to coordinate their teaching, individual efforts flounder. This comment points to how a shared theme alone may not connect educational programs. Teachers need opportunities to share ideas about broad educational approaches as well as individual classroom strategies.

The Media Academy used its ten hours collectively for team building and to explore the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Three teachers were Fellows at the Re:Learning summer lab school. Teachers active in such networks as the Philadelphia Writing Project and the Interactive Math Project work together on constructivist, student-centered pedagogy. One described a series of professional development sessions she has been leading with a Coalition colleague:

> [We] revisited a list [of goals and planned strategies] we did in June, 1994, on all the things we wanted to do ... We talked about which things we have done and haven't done. Why and why not and what things should we put on the list for next year. It went really well—a lot of reflection and a lot of conversation.

Getting All Students Invested In School Work

In one Marathon SLC, students described Dan Holman's ninth grade class as "different than other math classes, better. Usually you just sit and listen but here you do." The following scene is from his classroom:

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> Most of the students in the class are African American, a few are Latino, two are European American. They sit at tables, in groups of four, in a room with walls plastered with classroom codes, African American history posters, math game rules, and an abundance of math problems solved by students on large pieces of flip chart paper. Mr. Holman is active in teacher professional networks, and bases this math course on an Interactive Math Program (IMP) used in pockets throughout the city. The course makes math meaningful and accessible by relating problems to students' lives. Focusing today's lesson on "One-on-One," a probabilities problem framed in basketball terms, Mr. Holman takes a basketball from the closet and dribbles it around the classroom as he poses problems. "Player makes shot. What happens? Rebound. Another shot? How many points? Here's how Andre shoots." The students are excited by the teacher's dribbling; he makes them feel it's not stupid to care about the one-on-one situations he's acting out. They follow his banter, laughing and addressing his questions using their knowledge of basketball. The boys are especially vocal.
>
> Group work follows, constructed around the question "How many points are made over 20 tries of one-on-one?" Drawing different colored cubes from envelopes Mr. Holman has distributed to each group, the students complete and record 20 one-on-one attempts. They quickly become engaged in the activity. Their hands shoot up throughout the group work, and Mr. Holman can't get to all of them fast enough.

Mr. Holman engages students and encourages them to be active participants in their own learning. He has created a classroom context that attended to student interests, encouraged community, and was lively and inviting. Students said about such teachers, "They trust us, they give us more freedom to work on our own."

Julia Keaton's eleventh and twelfth grade Social Science class was a place where students told us their voices were heard and their opinions valued.

From a Researcher's Fieldnotes

Twenty students are seated in a large circle, and after they discuss and negotiate a rubric for the evaluation of their notebooks with Ms. Keaton, they read "Will you be a witness or an agent of change?" by Marian Wright Edelman. Ms. Keaton structures the reading as a Circle of Knowledge; students read the article, highlight passages most important to them, and then read the marked passages aloud, identifying their significance. Going around the circle, students report, one by one, each giving a reason for highlighting a particular passage.

"It's important to me because I'm scared for myself and my friends and family."

"Kids see people beat up people for nothing, a few dollars. They need to be taught better than that."

"We do bring out violence but it's all in the way people think. Lots of my friends are messed up because of drugs."

The students listen to each other attentively, often nodding or responding to the speaker with other nonverbal cues. Later they talk about the unique nature of Ms. Keaton's class, where they discuss real issues that are important to them —stereotyping, difference, race, racism, and violence. They describe the climate as one of common concern, as "family" where they dealt with their differences early on and now accept and are interested in each other.

Ms. Keaton, a member of the Re:Learning Faculty and a Marathon SLC that is an exploratory Coalition of Essential Schools school, works hard to help students "make connections" and become "better readers and writers and thinkers." She explained, "Students love it [Socratic Seminar]. They have a chance to express their point of view and hear their classmates on topics they don't usually talk about." In Ms. Keaton's classes, students listen to and learn from each other. A Teacher Consultant in the Philadelphia Writing Project, Ms. Keaton designs writing tasks which build on students' talk and challenge them to think critically about the world around them.

Teachers' concerns about students surfaced prominently in discussions about special education and how SLCs would develop programming that "included" special education students. Not surprisingly, most special education teachers worry about their students and themselves:

> Our kids are petrified. They talk a good game, but my great fear is that they will fall between the cracks...
>
> I'll be honest with you. We're all concerned about our positions. My job may be in jeopardy. They may eliminate special ed.

My great fear is that special education students will fall between the cracks.

A range of strategies for meeting the needs of special education students is emerging. For example, Renaissance has mainstreamed 7 of its 45 special education students. A coordinator's reflections about special education demonstrates how decentralization at Marathon is engaging teachers in thinking through tough dilemmas so that they can meet the needs of *all* their students.

> We don't have inclusion this year. The special ed kids are with regular ed kids during phys ed, lunch, advisory, and charter activities like trips. Next year I'm still not sure how it's going to play out. Special ed teachers will teach one non-special ed class, open to regular and special ed kids. If special ed won't do that, we will lose 20% of our special ed teachers. One possibility is to have a lot of students rostered to more regular classes with a resource room in the roster.
>
> Another possibility is to have a special ed teacher in a regular classroom. It's not the one I like. I don't want another person messing around with my class. And the three special ed teachers here are not science-oriented. How will they help in a science class unless they participate in really intensive professional development.

And in an SLC that pushed forward with inclusion this year, teachers reflected on the trade-offs:

> With most it's going well. They need more direct attention. Sometimes you forget they're there. As long as they get that extra bit of attention they're great.

These schools' stories show... how Philadelphia education reformers struggle to push school restructuring forward in harsh conditions.

> There are a couple you don't have a chance to get back to, that you don't have the extra time for. And the special ed teacher who's not here [on maternity leave] makes a lack of support right now. In the tenth grade one group didn't get Spanish. We were told that they were not bright enough but that was not true. Now everything's identical. We don't have any tracking at all.

Conclusion

An SLC coordinator considered the year and reminded us this about reform:

> This is just very very hard. It's a new system for the teachers, it's a new system for the students ... You just don't have past practice to go on. Every day is a new day.

At Marathon, we see the impact of: pre-existing off-site programs; an energetic principal with a vision for the school, a feel for change as a process, and a commitment to developing teacher leadership; the decision to institute dramatic changes in school structures in one year; and the importance of partnerships with outsiders as supports for the development of SLCs.

Marathon's "radical" decentralization made for rough spots in the first year but has also offered the opportunity for SLC teachers to plan their own professional development. Researchers at Marathon were impressed with the staff's ability to reflect on change so early in the process. Continued practice in reviewing and revising their change efforts and increased efforts to bring students into active roles point to possibilities for deepening change. Marathon also raises many questions including:

What are some next steps for Marathon that would push through to changing the culture of teaching and learning?

How can parents, students, and teachers invested in special programs—whether off-site "safe" campuses, magnets for the academically strong—be engaged in assessing and reforming them?

How might the District offer leadership, policy and resources that would support Marathon as it takes on detracking and desegregating special programs and constructing new roles for special education teachers?

REFERENCE

Christman, J.B. and Macpherson, P. (1996). *The Five School Study: Restructuring Philadelphia's Comprehensive High Schools*. Philadelphia, Penn: Philadelphia Education Fund.

ENDNOTE

In this report we use the term "small learning community" to connote the generic reform strategy of creating small units—schools within schools. The PSC originally called these units "charters," but the term small learning community has now been adopted. In Philadelphia, there are several kinds of small learning communities. Academies refer to long-standing occupationally based programs which serve selected groups of students. Academies have corporate/social service partners and are affiliated through communities, and like Academies have had admission standards for students. Throughout the report we most often refer to small learning community in the generic sense. Where it seems important to understand context, we identify the specific designation of the small learning community—home-grown charter, Academy, magnet program, etc.

section

Tools for Educators and Organizers

The Cross City Campaign has a commitment to producing practical tools for parents and educators. While the language in some of the following material is technical and may be useful only for academics and policy analysts, most of the pieces have been written to be used by educators, parents, and organizers as they attempt to build and sustain small learning communities.

chapter

Essential Elements of Small Schools

I'm tired of us as teachers and educators determining a place in society for the children by what we do with them. I think that we're still relegating, in our practice, children of color to a particular role in society. Sometimes in loving our students, we relegate them to this status. In a sense, we have made some achievements, but we have not given them the opportunities to be the bosses.

The history, curriculum, focus, biography, politics, and vision of every small school are wonderfully different from the next. Indeed, much of the strength of the small schools movement lies in its diversity. Yet across schools, there are some shared critical issues or, as they are named here, "essential elements." These include: school size; a focus on student learning; collaborative teams of teachers, parents, and community members; honest talk among educators; accountability; and high standards for all students. Based on our collective experience, these are tough, necessary, and often overlooked issues that need to be addressed and worked through if small schools are to get off the ground and fly.

Experience and research make very clear that school size does indeed matter—but they also make clear that "small" is no silver bullet. Reducing the size of a school will not automatically create equity, ensure quality curriculum and instruction, or produce across-the-board levels of high student achievement. When done well, however, small schools can be remarkable for improving the intellectual and social life of children, youth, educators, and parents. Successful small schools provide an educational environment where all students can achieve at high levels and where staff have exciting opportunities to teach and learn —and small schools can be a systemic strategy for inciting momentum into urban school reform.

The six essential elements we offer here are not a "recipe" for small schools—we do not mean that if you can check off everything on the list, you have succeeded in establishing a small school. As this volume makes clear, there are many ways to grow and sustain small schools. The diverse passions, creativity, and visions of teachers, students, parents, and community members are perhaps the most essential elements of all.

1. SCHOOL SIZE MATTERS

What Is: There are large schools that are often overcrowded with hundreds more students than the buildings were designed to hold. Teachers have 30 or 40 students in a class, and at the secondary level, teach five or six classes a day. In these settings, many students are anonymous and alienated while teachers are disconnected from each other and from students, and parents cannot imagine how to be engaged.

What Could Be: A district is filled with small, academically rigorous schools that give students a sense of purpose and belonging. Teachers and parents have a sense of ownership and authority that allows for creativity and collaboration. The result: student achievement within systemwide reform.

THE ISSUE

Small schools must be small in essence but large in curriculum.

Research on effective settings of instruction makes clear that smaller settings are better for students and teachers. Students are not just faceless names in an attendance book—their personalities, styles of learning, strengths, and needs are known by their teachers. Teachers, working together with a smaller group of students, are able to structure learning across the curriculum that works best for their students.

The research indicates that the optimal number of students in small learning communities hovers at about 300 for elementary schools and 500 for secondary schools. The size of the teaching staff is perhaps even more critical—approximately 20 teachers per small school. Deborah Meier has argued that a school's staff should be no larger than the number of people who can sit around a fairly large table and have a discussion. A group this size is small enough to work together as an effective team where collaboration and exchange are the norms, yet large enough to bring to the table diversity of experience, methodology, and content-area knowledge. In an environment of this size, students are known, yet they also have the opportunity to be engaged in a strong and diverse curriculum.

SMALL SCHOOLS IN ACTION

What are the results? This is the critical question about any strategy for school improvement. Quantitative and qualitative research, as well as personal accounts from small schools' students and staff, document the positive results that "small" can achieve.

Research shows that when controlling for all other factors (especially race, class, and gender), size is the one factor that substantially affects students' persistence, achievement, and levels of engagement. Smaller size also has a positive effect on a school's social environment and students' sense of attachment to the school. Through these mediating factors, small schools reduce violence, dropout rates, and positively affect achievement. Nationally, progressive teachers' unions can be heard advocating for small schools—and raising questions about large schools.

In 1992, a group of 14 teachers from across New York City founded the Renaissance School. Located in Queens, the school has about 450 students, kindergarten through 10th grade, and has already seen student test scores improve. In fact, reading and math scores are now the highest among middle schools in the local district. One Renaissance student believes he is learning more than his siblings who attend large, traditional high schools: "The difference here is that we get more attention from teachers because there are not that many students."

The collegial, family-like atmosphere possible in small schools provides a context for serious academic work and ongoing professional development. Sandra Geyer, Renaissance School co-founder and 4th-grade teacher, says a small school allows staff the flexibility "to discuss problems and make changes as you go along . . . One of the nice things about a small school is that you don't have to wait until the end of the semester to adjust things that are not working" (*American Teacher*, American Federation of Teachers, 1997).

2. FOCUS ON STUDENT LEARNING

What Is: Students may be offered a variety of classes, but there is no attempt to make connections among the content of various courses. And while there is an array of course offerings, students select or are led into courses that may not add up to a well-rounded education.

What Could Be: Small schools' staff teams are large enough to offer a diversity of experiences and a range of expertise. The curriculum is cohesive—the many subjects and course offerings fit together and create a solid, well-rounded education. Flexible scheduling and faculty teamwork allow for a level of depth and an interdisciplinary approach that provides students with a much richer educational experience.

THE ISSUES

A strong, cohesive learning environment is essential for student achievement.

"Emerging is some clarity on the features of an educational community that must be in place for students, faculty and parents to feel secure, creative and collaborative. Most agree that there must be a shared belief system . . . There *must* be a sense of 'where we are going' and leadership that keeps a steady course despite bumpy waves and intrusions. There *must* be a sense of what it means to belong to a community, what it means to violate community and what consequence follows from each. There *must* be a shared sense of standards, what a graduate should look like . . . Most educators we interviewed feel as though they are now working within school communities that were worth creating, worth sustaining and worth fighting for. They are spinning relationships with students, other teachers in their schools and with educators across schools." (Michelle Fine, *Refusing to be Deferred*, an evaluation of the New Visions Schools in New York City, September 1996).

Common, rigorous standards ensure a strong academic foundation across schools.

One of the arguments used to defend large schools is that they offer a wider variety of courses than do small schools. Upon closer look, however, the numbers of students exposed to high quality, interesting courses is usually a small minority of the total student population. In large schools, many students (particularly students of color and students from low-income communities) are tracked into low-level, remedial courses.

By contrast, small schools have been shown to offer similar curricula to that of larger schools but with much broader student access. The individualized approach to teaching and learning in small schools allows for the use of a variety of teaching methods to ensure that all students are exposed to rigorous curricula and achieve high standards.

Partnerships and alliances across small schools provide opportunities for extracurricular learning options.

Small schools must be creative in meeting all of their students' interests and needs. Extracurricular activities such as sports or orchestra may face extinction in a small school because of the smaller pool of potential participants. Creative collaborations between and among small schools can provide the proper number of students to form a football team or assemble an adequately staffed marching band.

SMALL SCHOOLS IN ACTION

The Manhattan International High School is a new and small multicultural alternative high school for recently arrived limited-English-proficient immigrant students. The school's educational philosophy is that all subjects have a relationship to each other. The school also believes that students learn best by working in small groups—that is, through collaborative learning.

In the classroom, students are active learners. They share their knowledge and abilities with each other, and collaborate on class projects. The teachers work as facilitators and mentors. Students rely not only on the teacher, but also on themselves and their classmates for revision of written assignments, study and development of vocabulary, and mastery of content. Encouraged to utilize their native language skills to support their learning of English, students regard their own cultural background and the backgrounds of other students as classroom resources that enhance and enrich learning experiences.

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3. ESTABLISHING TEAMS THAT WORK

What Is: Teachers are assigned randomly or by seniority to schools—and they can be "bumped" in the same way, with damaging consequences to school climate, collegiality, and continuity of instruction. Opportunities to talk to the same colleagues about students (let alone work together to coordinate curricula) are arbitrarily determined by a computer that gives teachers different prep periods each year. Teachers and students do not have the chance to really get to know each other and establish a sense of community or continuity over time, and there is little or no attempt to involve parents or community members in education. Anonymity—and tensions—abound.

What Could Be: Small public schools are designed and led by people committed to the schools—the teachers and other school staff, students, parents, and community members—not just by people who were assigned to the school by chance. These creators and leaders are able to determine the best ways to educate the students of the school, and the development and growth of teams is valued and respected. Hiring of new staff is done by those at the school in keeping with the educational plan and philosophy of the school.

THE ISSUES

Staff selection must take place at the school site.

Each school is, or should be, a unique place. Students and their educational needs, the philosophy and assumptions of school staff, and the community context produce schools that are, by design, very different from one another—though all aim toward high standards. In small schools, it is inconceivable to think that teachers and other staff are interchangeable and that just anyone with the appropriate experience and credentials will suffice.

Small schools are developed by teams of parents, teachers, and others who have an understanding of, and share fundamental beliefs about, students and their abilities to achieve. These teams also work hard to respect each other's differences, while creating a common spirit and rapport that work for them and their students. When a staff position becomes available, it is therefore imperative that those who established the school have hiring authority. Hiring a person who understands the culture and is interested in contributing to that culture is essential if the school is to thrive.

There must be continuity of staff teams and continuity of instruction across grade levels.

Working as a team, school staff, with parents and community members, have the capacity to develop an educational setting that is best suited to their students. Once a staff team has established itself —both among themselves and with their students—it can be damaging to all involved to "change teams" simply because the academic year has ended. Small schools allow teams to determine that they should stay together for the period of time (for example, over the four years of high school) that is of greatest benefit to their students. Team continuity is critical: it counters the idea that, for example, 9th-grade teachers should be a team, 10th-grade teachers should be a team, and so on—an idea that forces students into transitions at the beginning of each school year, transitions that are more difficult for students most in need.

The team concept, with teachers and students staying together from grades 9 through 12, is richer and more complex. It recognizes that students are on a journey to achieve a high-quality education—and that this is not necessarily the same as passing from one grade to the next.

SMALL SCHOOLS IN ACTION

New York City's P.S. 261, a public elementary school in Brooklyn, houses a number of small schools. When one of them, the Children's Learning Cooperative (CLC), was ready to select its first teacher-director, the school implemented a democratic selection process for filling the position.

A committee of parents, teachers, and others was formed, and they put out a call to solicit resumes from people interested in the teacher-director position. After reviewing the resumes, the committee interviewed candidates and made a recommendation to all of the teachers in the CLC so that the teachers—who would be working most closely with the teacher-director—could have the final say. They accepted the committee's recommendation —Mark Buswinka, a popular teacher at the school—and sent it on to the district superintendent, who also approved the selection. This process was so successful that it is now also used to hire teachers for the school.

My colleague and I, through the experience of having these discussions, had "honored the difficult." Without that experience, there is no way we would have been prepared to, or able to, engage in discussions with other educators who were also trying to reform their teaching practices and improve student learning.

4. HARD TALK AMONG EDUCATORS

What Is: Within most large schools, more often than not, teachers literally work in isolation, a situation that makes it impossible to collaborate in interdisciplinary ways and share ideas about content and methodology with their colleagues. The system encourages this isolation by not providing scheduling flexibility and other resources that are needed to support teachers' collegial efforts to improve. As a result, essential questions about race, class, gender equity, sexual orientation, ethics, outcomes, and special education rarely get a hearing.

What Could Be: Instructional practice and talk about teaching, learning, and student work becomes public. Teachers choose their instructional teams and are given the freedom and supports to implement their shared plans. Time is given for common planning and exchanging valuable information about students—and there is well-funded time for professional development. To support high achievement for all students, creative educational options —such as having one group of teachers remain with the same students over time— are made available to teams.

THE ISSUE

Teachers feel safe and supported in their efforts to develop and implement effective instructional strategies.

A radical shift in culture encourages teachers to come out from behind their classroom doors and work in a collegial fashion with their peers—and this shift requires that making mistakes and giving and receiving constructive criticism is respected as a means of learning and improving.

High-quality professional development means time for teachers to work together on a daily basis, allowing for ongoing and reflective conversations about curriculum, student assignments and work, and teaching and learning. It also means opportunities for outsiders to come in and consult on a variety of relevant and timely areas—including, for example, effective teamwork, innovative instructional strategies, and content-specific training.

For teachers to feel safe and supported, it is essential that staff teams have the ability to stay together. Relationship building takes time and tremendous effort. If a team is arbitrarily reorganized by someone outside its group, the team will essentially have to start over, compromising its integrity and its ability to educate students. Only in teams where there is continuity and trust can the tough talk of teaching and learning, equity and ethics, begin.

SMALL SCHOOLS IN ACTION

In New York City, small school educators working within and with New Visions schools met monthly to talk about early impressions, struggles, accomplishments, and tentative resolutions of crises. The following is an excerpt from a letter written to the group by Michelle Fine after an early meeting that focused on the needs, strengths, and difficulties of students —particularly those who were somewhat disaffected, disengaged, or not yet respectful members of the budding and fragile school communities.

> Many of you acknowledged that you have 'received,' within the new schools, more than you expected, students with extraordinary 'needs.' While you have all resisted a language of exclusion, victim blame, or deficiency, many are alarmed at the possibility that a more than equitable share of 'special needs' students were poured into/detoured into New Visions schools. We are all aware that this is as sensitive as it is apparent.
>
> Students are coming to these schools at vulnerable ages with complicated lives and often minimal education in their pasts. They have typically not been socialized toward inquiry, active learning, or the habits of being responsible, prepared, and cooperative students. Cross sites, students in the beginning were 'running wild.' Parents of 'more serious' students were concerned, and there was some suspicion that when these behaviors fall along the tumbling fault lines of class and race they are even more difficult to handle.
>
> At no point, however, does your talk degenerate into the unfortunately typical mantra of 'those kids' or 'those mothers.' Instead, I keep hearing a group of educators struggling for strategies, trying to learn how to engage, how to manage the student who is 'acting out' and still honor the remaining students who are engaged, if bewildered and/or scared.
>
> One teacher put it well when she said, 'We're trying to do something different. It is difficult for us. We hit an obstacle and sometimes we go back to the same old ways, even if we know they didn't work. We hit bureaucracy and cave in. The kids are also programmed to do it as they always did it. We need to reassure the kids that we are different, and you and we have to change. But we need to keep asking ourselves and each other, how?'
>
> With enormous care and trepidation, we tiptoed into conversation about 'separating' disruptive students for special, individualized attention—temporarily. In a discussion drenched in ambivalence and respect, we wandered into thorny territory. Do some students need/deserve special attention? Do other students need/deserve for the former to be removed? How are race/ethnicity and racism nested in these decisions? Would 'separation' in a racially integrated school look like segregation if a disproportionate number of those separated are students of color?
>
> We landed hard and fast, right in the center of talk about race and racism. What do students carry about their racial identities, how do teachers and peers react to students from different racial groups, how do parents hear teachers responding to their children from different racial groups, and how has racism kept us from having these conversations? Will teachers from differing racial, ethnic and class-based identifications 'see' the world of students and urban education differently and/or make different choices? Can we have a conversation and not get fixed in false presumptions about our essential differences?
>
> This evening I heard incredible generosity of spirit from women and men across racial and ethnic groups trying to understand, trying to speak, but also trying to listen.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

What Is: Accountability means compliance with regulations and submission of properly filled out forms, along with rules of behavior for students and staff.

What Could Be: Accountability means answering the question: "Did all students learn and achieve at the highest level?" Clear and rigorous standards, measured by authentic assessments and data, determine whether or not schools meet their core learning goals.

THE ISSUES

Accountability must be focused on student achievement and must be woven throughout the school by teachers, parents, students, and others within the school community.

What counts and who decides? Historically, the answers have been: (1) the forms that are filled out, and (2) the central office bureaucracy. Accountability often has absolutely nothing to do with student learning and achievement and is controlled by those most removed from students and classrooms.

Instead, accountability must be authentic and interwoven throughout the school by the people at the school level. Teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members must be held accountable for students' achievement of rigorous curricula, graduation, and future success in postsecondary education and careers. Accountability should have nothing to do with correctly filling out and submitting forms.

Equitable, stable, and locally controlled school funding must be in place.

Achievement of authentic accountability implies a significant shift in power and authority. In order to be held accountable, the local school community must have control over resources and the power to make decisions necessary for students to achieve. For too long, school systems have held teachers and students accountable for results they had neither the resources nor authority to achieve. Teachers and students are then blamed for missing a mark they had no role in setting and no support in attaining.

Staff teams must have power to make educational decisions that work for their students and money to implement their decisions. This fiscal authority cannot be a "pilot project" for a year or two; it needs to be sustained over time. Schools need a funding contract with the district that assures financial control, while requiring accountability for student learning.

SMALL SCHOOLS IN ACTION

In New York City, a number of new small learning communities were opened in buildings that had previously housed large public high schools. Those large schools were closed, with the support of the teachers' union, because they were failing their students. One of those schools was Andrew Jackson High School, which was beset with problems of decreasing student achievement, increasing incidents of violence, and low levels of parental involvement. Throughout the district, Jackson had become known as a "dumping ground" for students that other schools did not want. The staff and students at Jackson felt abandoned by the district. There was no accountability.

Public hearings and extensive discussions among the United Federation of Teachers, the district superintendent, school staff, community members, and a New York State assemblywoman led to a proposal to reconstitute Jackson as a group of autonomous, theme-based schools. Teachers from Jackson were not automatically assigned to these new learning communities. They, along with others, applied, and about half of the 250 who had previously worked there were selected to teach in the new schools.

The Campus Magnet Schools, as the building is now called, comprises four small schools that offer focused and rigorous curricula. All of the schools emphasize individualized attention for students, staff collaboration, and outreach to parents and the community. Each of the schools is accountable for the academic achievement of its students.

While Campus Magnet Schools receives the same funds from the board of education that Jackson had received, they are using the money differently—to reduce class size; to support integrated, theme-based curricula; and to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement.

Since 1993, when the transformation began, the environment in the building has shifted dramatically. Students and teachers report that the Campus Magnets have established a much safer and more positive environment, where students and teachers know each other and where parents feel comfortable being involved in their children's education.

Edward Stone, a 20-year veteran music teacher at Jackson who applied for and was hired to teach at one of the Campus Magnet Schools, notes that he can work individually with students now because his weekly class load is about 125 students, down from 350 when he taught at Jackson. And, he says, "I've also gotten to know many of the parents personally, which I couldn't do before." Dana Wilson, another teacher at the Campus Magnet Schools, adds, "There's less of a chance of a kid misbehaving when he knows that you know him and his parents" (*American Teacher*, American Federation of Teachers, 1997).

Just having teachers on teams with common planning time is not enough. Before structures, before authentic instruction and authentic assessment, there have to be relationships—authentic.

6. HIGH STANDARDS FOR ALL

What Is: Students are put on an educational "track" based on perceived "ability" or, more likely, their history of opportunities or achievement. This process often begins at an early age and relegates certain students (particularly students of color and students from low-income families) to less rigorous tracks for the majority of their school years. Not surprisingly, people outside of the school have little or no understanding of, or respect for, the quality of education that students receive.

What Could Be: The same rigorous standards are expected of all students, and staff teams develop multiple ways of assuring that students achieve these standards. All students leave high school with the option of attending a four-year college and/or entering the work force. The diploma students receive has clear meaning—and the entire community understands what it takes to attain that diploma.

THE ISSUES

All students are educated so that they have the option of entering college or work, or both, after graduation.

Decisions about what a child will do "when he or she grows up" should not be made by an elementary or high school teacher—they are made by the child. Every child must, therefore, be prepared for the full range of future options. This means that tracking students, deciding who is "college prep" and who is not, must end. All students must be educated in a full range of rigorous courses, giving them options upon graduation. School tracks cannot be allowed to limit students' future possibilities.

Small schools must transform the entire school and school system, not become either magnets or a euphemism for tracking.

Small schools should not be considered pilot projects or "appropriate" only for certain students. Even a school-within-a-school must ultimately transform the entire school to ensure that all students are getting the highest quality education possible. And even when a large school is completely divided into several small schools, the caliber of education in each must be of equally high quality, and each must have a diverse student body. Reserving one small school for "college bound" students and another for "regular" students is just another way of tracking and of deciding for students what their futures will be.

Performance-based standards and content-rich assessments reflect communitywide consensus and have meaning in the community.

Academic achievement goals must be developed through a process that includes parents and community members as well as students and school personnel. These goals will measure what students can *do* in addition to what they *know*. Measuring achievement of these academic goals requires creative assessment techniques—not just multiple-choice exams. When everyone inside and outside of a school understands its academic goals, they can evaluate the school's success. Consensus on the goals also allows employers and others to be clear about what being a "good student" at a given school means. Small schools may vary in their delivery of instruction but not in their goals for high academic achievement.

SMALL SCHOOLS IN ACTION

El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, located in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, is a collaboration of El Puente (a community organization for young people and their families) and neighborhood teachers and community members. The school, which has just over 100 students in grades 9 through 12, has a project-focused curriculum that links learning with community experiences and issues, such as the environment and health care. El Puente (the name is Spanish for "the bridge"), the Williamsburg community, and other resources throughout the city serve as the Academy's extended campus.

Employing a dual language (Spanish/English) approach to instruction, El Puente's four cornerstone principles of holism, collective self-help, safety, and respect guide the Academy's curriculum. School and community are intertwined. The Academy offers students access to El Puente's Health and Wellness Clinic, Performing and Visual Arts Program, college/career counseling services, and internship opportunities. Students, in turn, give back through a strong community-service component. They have, for example, created community pollution-prevention teams, organized immunization and lead-screening clinics, and produced cultural festivals.

But perhaps what is most important, the Academy emphasizes intellectual rigor and academic achievement for all of its students. Standards are consistently high. The school, early on, recognized that there are certain subject areas in which children must be competent in order to function in society and in higher education, and it ensures that its students have the opportunity to obtain that depth and level of instruction. At the Academy, the goal is for students to be on a competitive level with any student in the best school in the "best" neighborhood in the city.

chapter

The Small School Movement: A Review of the Literature

by Robert Gladden

Research has found that students in small schools are suspended less often, feel safer at school, use drugs less often, and are truant from school less often than students in larger schools.

Across the country, community groups and educators are advocating for smaller schools in urban, rural and suburban communities. This review explores research on the relationship between school size and a variety of outcomes in secondary schools such as student achievement. The review strives to understand the processes through which small schools may contribute to school improvement. I hope the review will help communicate the research findings concerning small schools as well as shed light on some of the long-term debates on school size.

A major limitation on contemporary research on small schools is that the research trails behind the activities of educational activists and urban school districts. Trying to capitalize on the already well documented advantages of small schools, some urban schools have broken down their existing larger schools into smaller schools and/or created teams of teachers in their school. Small schools are challenging policy makers, practitioners and researchers to ask new questions about how schools work and to transform the way we look at student achievement, leadership, school structure and school composition, e.g. special education. In order to keep research relevant, an important challenge for new research is to create methods to assess how "smallness" is being implemented and supported by the leadership of school districts, especially urban districts, around the country.

One of the major school reform movements in the 20th century has been the school consolidation movement. Between 1940 and 1990, the number of elementary, middle, and secondary schools has declined by 69 percent while average enrollment has risen 500 percent, from 127 students to 653 students per school (Bryk, Lee, and Smith, 1993). This trend was, and is, especially strong in secondary schools: from 1930 to 1970, the average secondary school enrollment increased to 1,000 students (Fowler, 1992). In urban areas, some schools have become mammoth, housing 3,000 or more students.

The two main purposes of the school consolidation movement were to: (1) offer students more educational opportunities by providing them equal access to a wide variety of courses and resources, and (2) increase the economic efficiency of schools by exploiting economies of scale (Bryk, Lee, and Smith, 1993). However, experiences with the failures of large urban schools, along with educational research, have led to findings that larger school size is related to higher dropout rates; higher levels of disorder and violence, student alienation, and teacher dissatisfaction; and lower levels of academic achievement (Fowler, 1992; Klonsky, 1995; Howley, 1989). Based on parents' and students' personal experiences and these research

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MAJOR FINDINGS: SMALL SCHOOLS WORK

The literature review led to these findings:

- **Research has consistently found that students at small schools are less alienated than students in large schools—and this positive effect is especially strong for students labeled "at risk."** Smaller schools have lower levels of violence and disorder, lower dropout rates, and higher attendance rates than larger schools. Thus, they provide the prerequisite conditions needed to educate any community: attendance by its students and a safe learning environment.

- **Students at smaller schools are more actively engaged with their schools than students at large schools—and, again, "at-risk" students especially benefit.** In small schools, almost all students need to participate if important activities such as a school newspaper or student government are going to survive.

- **In small schools, the relationship between teachers and administrative staff is more collegial than in large schools.**

- **The average achievement of students as measured by standardized tests tends to be higher in small schools than in large schools.**

- **The effect of school size on schools' social environments affects, in turn, students' achievement on standardized tests.** Smaller school size lessens the amount of violence and disorder in school, improves student attendance, lowers dropout rates, and raises the level of student participation. These factors, in turn, contribute to an increase in the level of students' achievement. By failing to model this relationship, some research may have erroneously concluded that small school size has a nonsignificant or even a negative effect on student achievement.

- **Students attending small schools are more likely to pass their courses, accumulate credits, and attain a higher level of education than students who attend large schools.**

- **Although large schools offer more courses than small schools, these additional courses only benefit a small percentage of students.** Advocates of large schools argue that their size enables them to serve students better by offering a range of courses tailored to students' talents and specific needs. However, this broader range of courses fails to increase the average achievement of students attending the school, and contributes to a stratified and sometimes hostile learning environment.

- **Minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds perform significantly better in small schools than in large schools.**

- **Small theme-based high schools, such as alternative schools and charters, strengthen and expand the positive benefits of small schools—especially for students who are considered "at risk" or who have not succeeded in traditional high school settings.**

findings, community groups (Cross City Campaign, 1995), educators (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996), and the media (Alter, 1995) are advocating for smaller schools. This pressure has produced tangible results as New York City (Oxley, 1989), Philadelphia (Fine, 1994), and Chicago (Business and Professional People for Public Interest, 1995) have introduced policies that support the creation of smaller schools.

The movement for small schools, however, faces multiple barriers, including the underfunding of small schools (Oxley, 1989), transforming the bureaucracy of large schools into functional and autonomous small schools (Oxley, 1989; Oxley, 1994; Public Education Association, 1992b), and governmental resistance to making small schools the predominant form of education in America's secondary schools (Public Education Association, 1992b). For example, a $100 million construction program in New York budgeted the majority of its money for building large schools capable of housing 2,000 students (Public Education Association, 1992a).

METHODOLOGY

This paper reviews contemporary research on secondary schools that explores the relationship between school size and schools' social environment (for example, the level of disorder and violence); students' attachment to their schools (for example, dropout rates); teachers' attachment to their schools (for example, teacher satisfaction); the professional environment of schools (for example, the

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relationship among and between teachers and administrators); and student achievement.

In selecting the 54 articles that were reviewed, two principles were primary: relevancy to contemporary education and inclusion of all studies regardless of whether their findings favored large or small schools. Because the challenges faced by students today are significantly different from the challenges faced by students in the 1960s and 1970s, and because numerous other papers have comprehensively reviewed earlier research (Klonsky, 1995; Public Education Association, 1992a), this review focuses on research published within the last decade. However, in areas where the research over the last decade was sparse, additional important articles published in the early 1980s have been included in the review. In addition, findings and theoretical insights from other reviews and research were used to interpret the patterns found among these 54 studies.

In order to comprehensively examine the research published in the last decade, any empirical article in the ERIC database that mentioned in its abstract the relationship between school size and educational outcomes was included in the review. Furthermore, other relevant articles were identified in the reference lists of these papers. Five of the identified articles, including governmental reports and reports issued by organizations not replicated in ERIC, were either excluded from the review (three articles) or summarized from other resources (two articles).

WHAT IS A SMALL SCHOOL?

In order to create effective small schools, the definition of a "small school" and the processes through which a small school affects educational outcomes need to be delineated. One fear of "small school" reformers and researchers is that the growing success of "small school" reform might transform the concept into a buzzword with little meaning (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995; Lee and Smith, 1994)[1]. By defining the important characteristics of small schools and understanding how small schools affect educational quality, educators and reformers can help create effective small schools and avoid school "reform" that means nothing more than insignificant reductions or freezes in school size.

Research on school size has long tried to determine the optimum size of high schools. This search has led to a wide range of estimates and failed to reach a consensus—a review of research between 1925 and 1974 found that researchers' estimates of the optimum high school size varied by as much as 1,700 students (Barker, 1986).

Even among advocates of small schools, the definition of what constitutes a small school varies. Some proponents for smaller schools advocate reducing the size of high schools but do not identify how this process should take place. Others recommend creating small high school communities with maximum populations of 500 students. In fact, most research and some advocates of smaller schools talk about *relative* smallness rather than small schools *per se*. They argue that reductions in school size increase students' and teachers' attachment toward their schools—that is, smaller size reduces feelings of alienation. Furthermore, the effect of school size is assumed to be linear: decreasing enrollment from 2,000 to 1,500 students is assumed to have the same effect as reducing enrollment from 800 to 300.

According to this linear theory, the optimum school size should try to maximize the social advantages of small schools (for example, closer relationships between students and teachers) while simultaneously minimizing the perceived economic disadvantages of smaller size, such as losing material resources and having less diverse course offerings (Lee and Smith, 1996; Monk, 1987; Haller, Monk, and Tien, 1992). Researchers working within this theoretical framework tend to endorse an optimal school size of 500 to 900 students (Lee and Smith, 1996; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996).

A second theory of small schools envisions schools as a context for creating and sustaining unique learning communities (Gregory, 1992; Meier, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1993). Instead of being governed by bureaucracies and formal rules, these small school communities are envisioned as having: (1) a maximum population of 500 students; (2) a heterogeneous mix of students that represents the local community; (3) a cohesive, self-selected faculty led by a teacher-director; (4) a high degree of autonomy concerning issues involving curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (5) a coherent curricular or pedagogical focus that provides a continuous educational experience across a range of grades; and (6) an inclusive admissions policy that gives weight to student and parent

[1]Endnote - See page 131

commitment to the school mission (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995; Cross City Campaign, 1995; Klonsky, 1995).

Proponents of this position argue that the full advantages of smaller school size can only be realized through the hard work of teachers and school administrators who are committed to implementing the characteristics outlined above:

> In the words of Deborah Meier, nationally recognized leader of the small schools movement, "We will not achieve the reforms we need by fiat." Small schools must be conceived and planned on an individual basis. They require dedicated teachers, lots of planning, hours of additional (and often uncompensated) work, and tremendous determination (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995, p. 1).

In this review, schools that fit the guidelines of this second theory will be referred to as "focus schools."

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SIZE, SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Most research on school size has chosen to study either the relationship between school size and social aspects of schools, such as dropout rates, or the relationship between school size and student achievement. Few studies have systematically studied the relationship among all three factors: school size, the social environment of schools, and student achievement. This is problematic because contemporary research has found that school size affects social aspects of a school, which, in turn, affects the level of student achievement (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Lee and Smith, 1994; Lee, Smith, and Croniger, 1995). Thus, although school size may not *directly* affect student achievement, it may affect the environment of schools, and that environment affects student achievement. For example, small school size has been shown to affect students' involvement in school activities (see Table 1 in the Appendix), and student involvement in extracurricular activities is related to higher levels of achievement (Howley and Huang, 1991). Thus, changes in school size may not directly affect achievement, but they may raise students' participation in school life, which then raises their achievement.

This review analyzes the effect of school size on students' social environment, teachers' social environment, and student achievement. In order to model the relationship between school size and achievement—and to test whether schools' social environments mediate the relationship between school size and student achievement, as suggested by some empirical and theoretical work (Bryk, Lee, and Smith, 1990)—the relationship between school size and schools' social environments will be reviewed first (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). The results from this analysis will then be used to interpret the research findings on the relationship between small schools and student achievement.

STUDENTS' SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Research has consistently found that students at small schools are less alienated and more attached to their schools than students at large schools. Students' alienation from school is typically assessed by analyzing the relationship between school size, violence and disorder, and dropout rates. Students' attachment to their school is typically measured by their participation in extracurricular activities, attendance rates, and their satisfaction and engagement with school. This section reviews the research on those factors, as well as the literature on the relationship between school size and parental involvement in their children's academic life.

School Violence and Disorder

At the adolescent level, if I could do one single thing [to stop the scourge of violence among juveniles] it would be to ensure that teenagers are not in high schools bigger than 400 to 500 students (James Garbarino, Director of Family Life Development at Cornell University, cited in Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995).

Research has found that students in small schools are suspended less often (Franklin and Crone, 1992), feel safer at school (Gottfredson, 1985), use drugs less often (Page, 1991), and are truant from school less often (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988) than students in larger schools. In addition, smaller schools have fewer discipline problems in the classroom than larger schools (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988), and principals report fewer problems such as assault and vandalism (Pittman and Haughwout, 1987). Overall, nine out of 11 studies found a positive relationship between smaller school size and lower levels of drug abuse, truancy, vandalism, and student victimization (see Table 2 in the Appendix). No studies found a positive relationship between larger school size and lower levels of school violence school violence and disorder.

Further, the effect of school size on violence and disorder appears especially strong for disadvantaged students. One study—a survey of students in 42 urban

comprehensive high schools that were receiving funding to prevent juvenile delinquency—found that disadvantaged students at small urban schools were less involved in drugs and serious delinquent acts than disadvantaged students in large schools (Gottfredson, 1985). Some of the differences were extremely large: for example, female students in small schools were three times less likely to use drugs than their counterparts in large schools. These positive findings suggest that smaller school size may be an important method for reducing the problems of violence that are often faced by large urban schools.

Two studies found that the effect of school size on school violence and disorder was mediated by particular features of the school's social environment. Specifically, one study found that efficient school procedures and positive relationships between teachers and administrators mediated the effect of small school size on students' and teachers' perceptions of school safety (Gottfredson, 1985).

The second study found that the effect of school size on class cutting and discipline problems was mediated by the quality of relationships that existed among students, teachers, and administrators. In particular, smaller size was related to schools' having a more communal environment—a school shares a common mission, faculty have positive relationships with other faculty and administrators, and faculty have close relationships with their students that extend beyond the traditional role of teacher—than larger schools. Students in schools with strong communal environments were found to cut class less and cause fewer discipline problems than students attending schools with weak communal environments. In addition, small school size may provide faculty with the opportunity to have extended informal contact with other teachers, administrators, and students, which, in turn, fosters more cooperative relationships. In contrast, in larger schools, informal and extended relationships among staff, teachers, and faculty are replaced with formal rules and procedures, which often alienate and isolate teachers (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988).

Small alternative schools—examples of "focus schools"—have an especially positive effect on decreasing violence and disorder. New York City alternative schools, which serve a total of 30,000 students, on average suspended 13 students per year over a two-year period; public schools, in contrast, on average suspended 170 students per year. In addition, students in alternative schools were involved in only 10 of the 3,843 serious incidents in the 1990-1991 school year. These figures are even more remarkable because students attending alternative schools are at-risk students who have had problems in traditional, large high schools (Public Education Association, 1992b).

Similarly, a researcher studying the creation of "charters" in Philadelphia—small programs based on the focus-school model—discovered that the small context of charters changed the focus of educators from discipline to teaching students and to engaging them in problem-resolution discussions instead of confrontations:

> The teachers felt that the charter's organizational structure—smaller, more intimate units of academic and relational continuity over a four-year period—was key to setting a context in

Student participation in extracurricular activities in schools with enrollments ranging between 61 and 150 students is three times to 20 times greater than in schools with enrollments exceeding 2,000 students. (Nachtigal, 1992)

Instead of enhancing students' achievement, academic tracking and differences in course taking patterns have been shown to increase achievement gaps between students from different social and academic backgrounds. Thus, an increased number of courses often leads to a differentiation of students that reinforces existing inequalities (Lee and Bryk, 1988).

which change from a focus on discipline to a focus on student outcomes could happen (Zane, 1994, p. 128).

> Students know we will sit and listen. They can get angry and disagree, and we'll help them work through it. If teachers ask them a question, students know that teachers legitimately care about their response. The teachers take time to explain why they're asking certain questions . . . and if they are wrong about something, they will apologize . . . Students now trust talking rather than fighting (Zane, 1994, p. 129).

Small schools create supportive and open environments where discipline problems are prevented instead of reacted to: "Last year we had zero incidents . . . Our school structure is preventative; it reduces discipline problems" (a principal quoted in Public Education Association, 1992b, Appendix 2, p. 10).

Dropout Rates

Regardless of how dropout rates are measured, the results are the same: dropout rates are consistently, and often strikingly, lower in small schools. In New York City, the dropout rate of schools with 2,000 students is twice as high as schools with 600 or fewer students (Oxley, 1989). In Texas, the estimate of students who will drop out between 9th grade and graduation is 18 percent for schools enrolling fewer than 500 students and 28 percent for schools enrolling more than 2,000 students. Even more shocking is that in Texas' largest school districts—district size highly correlates with school size—the average longitudinal dropout rate is 56 percent (Toenjes, 1989). Furthermore, the effect of school size on dropout rates was, in one study, twice as strong as the effect of average socioeconomic status (SES), measured by percentage of families on AFDC. The size of schools exerts a consistent positive effect on the dropout rates of America's high schools: all eight reviewed studies found a positive relationship between smaller schools and lower dropout rates (see Table 3 in the Appendix).

One study suggests that small schools are especially beneficial for students who are of low socioeconomic status. In Louisiana, the lowest dropout rates were found in small schools that predominantly serve students from either high or low-average SES. The highest dropout rates were found in large schools that serve predominantly students with low SES (Franklin and Crone, 1992).

Two studies identified variables that mediated the relationship between school size and dropout rates. One study found that the communal environment of a school (for example, teacher collegiality, teachers' participation in extracurricular activities, a common school mission) partially mediated the effect of school size on schools' dropout rates (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). A second study identified four variables—principals' ratings of school problems such as assault and vandalism, the involvement of students in extracurricular activities, quality of faculty interaction, and students' sense of cohesion—that mediated the effect of school size on dropout rates (Pittman and Haughwout, 1987). These results suggest the school size may influence dropout rates by lowering discipline problems in the schools; enhancing interactions among teachers, administrators, and faculty; and integrating students into the school.

Extracurricular Activities

I guess I feel saddened by the fact that a lot of small schools are being closed. I really feel fortunate to have gone to a small school. I was able to participate in a wide variety of activities in which I learned so much that books couldn't teach. I hope there are small schools around when my children reach high school so they can participate and enjoy whatever they choose to be in (Stevens and Peltier, 1994, p. 26).

Student participation in extracurricular activities in schools with enrollments ranging between 61 and 150 students is three times to 20 times greater than in schools with enrollments exceeding 2,000 students (Nachtigal, 1992). In addition to higher levels of participation, students in smaller schools are more likely to be involved in more than one extracurricular activity (Gottfredson, 1985; Schoggen, 1984). The relationship between smaller school size and increased extracurricular activity was found in seven out of eight reviewed studies (see Table 1 in the Appendix)[2].

A study that analyzed the participation rates of "marginal" students found that those students participated more in smaller schools than did marginal students in large schools (Gottfredson, 1985). The study was conducted in urban schools with high levels of student problems, and the results suggest that shrinking school size provides a method for increasing the involvement of traditionally marginal students—when schools are small, they need to involve more of their students in extracurricular programs in order to maintain such activities as student government, a school newspaper, or sports teams:

> The pressure which small schools are shown to exert more successfully than large ones helps to contribute to a sense of competence, since whether weak, strong, inept, skillful, young or experienced, each pupil really is important. Many activities cannot continue without his [or her] participation, and the increases in the sense of responsibility which this situation generates are likely to produce greater and earlier maturity, as well as greater capacity for leadership (Schoggen, 1984, p. 95).

The relationship between school size and extracurricular participation is an important advantage of smaller schools. Across schools, higher levels of participation are associated with higher levels of academic achievement (Howley and Huang, 1991) and higher participation in community organizations in adult life (Lindsay, 1984).

One argument used to justify large schools is that they would provide students with more diverse extracurricular activities (Schoggen, 1984). Although larger schools do offer more diverse extracurricular opportunities than smaller schools, the average student does not benefit because the number of new opportunities available in large schools is insufficient to include most of its student body. For example, one study found that large schools offer four times as many activities as small schools, but large schools offer these activities to populations 15 times larger than populations in small schools (Schoggen, 1984). Thus, the increased opportunities for participation in large schools are enjoyed by a small percent of students and are created at the social cost of excluding other students from participating in any activity.

[2]Endnote - See page 131

Attendance

Attendance rates in small schools are consistently higher than attendance rates in large schools. Four out of five studies reviewed found that smaller schools are associated with higher levels of attendance (see Table 4 in the Appendix) and have the strongest effect in schools that serve students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds[3]. In Louisiana schools that serve low-income students, small schools dramatically increased attendance rates. Large schools with low student SES had the lowest attendance rates. In contrast, student attendance rates in small, low SES schools attained the same level as large schools serving students with high SES (Franklin and Crone, 1992).

Focus schools have a dramatic impact on student attendance. A study of eight alternative schools in New York found that those schools, on average, cut the absenteeism rate of their students by 40 percent (Foley and McConnaughy, 1982). Similarly, a large study of charter and noncharter students in Philadelphia found that, overall, charter students' daily attendance was 5.8 percent higher than noncharter students; for 9th graders, there was an average 8 percent difference between charter and noncharter students' daily attendance (Fine, 1994).

Student Attachment/Academic Attitudes

The research findings are inconsistent concerning the relationships between school size and students' attachment to their school and attitudes toward learning. They suggest that school size alone is insufficient to improve students' general attachment and attitudes. Only small theme-based schools made students feel more attached to and satisfied with their schools.

Only one of four large surveys found a relationship between school size and student attachment to their schools and academic attitudes (see Table 5 in the Appendix). The reliability of the positive finding is dubious, however, because the survey combined measures of students' attachment and academic attitudes with measures of attendance and class cutting (Gottfredson, 1985). Because a strong relationship exists between school size, attendance, and school disorder, one cannot determine if the relationship detected in this study is attributable to these measures of attendance and disorder instead of to measures of student attachment. As a whole, the general surveys suggest that school size has no effect on students' attachment to their school and academic attitudes[4].

In contrast to the nonsignificant findings of the national surveys, studies on small theme-based schools have found that they can transform students' attitudes. A recent evaluation of the house system (a system designed to create a learning environment compatible with the criteria, described earlier, for small focus schools) in New York City found that students' ratings of their schools' social and academic environment (for example, commitment of teachers) were significantly higher in smaller schools. Furthermore, students in strong house systems—schools closely fitting the criteria for small focus schools—rated their schools' social and academic environment as significantly better than did students in weak house systems. Furthermore, the evaluation found that students in small schools with weak house systems perceived their school environment almost as positively as students in large schools with strong house systems (Oxley, 1990).

Changing only school size or only the traditional structure of schools has a limited effect on students' attachment, as seen by the results of the large surveys. However, small schools that adhere to the principles for theme-based (or "focus") schools—a maximum population of 500 students; a heterogeneous mix of students that represents the local community; a cohesive, self-selected faculty led by a teacher-director; a high degree of autonomy concerning issues involving curriculum, instruction, and assessment; a coherent curricular or pedagogical focus that provides a continuous educational experience across a range of grades; and an inclusive admissions policy that gives weight to student and parent commitments to the school mission—have been shown to have a strong positive affect on students' attitudes (Cross City Campaign, 1995; Klonsky, 1995). Another recent study also supports this conclusion. This study found that students in a charter of 300 students had significantly better relationships with their peers than other students attending the same school of 2,000 students who were not part of the charter (Oxley, 1995).

The positive effect of focus schools seems to most benefit "at risk" students. For example, a student attending an alternative school in New York commented:

[3] Endnote - See page 131

> I feel better about school because I am learning what I want to learn. I feel more like a person. At my previous high school, they treated us like smart monkeys. Learning was not seen as being for ourselves, or controlled by ourselves. We were ushered from class to class. There was no room for anything else (Foley and McConnaughy, 1982).

A student in one of Philadelphia's small charter schools echoed this theme:

> At Inquiry [the name of the student's charter] everybody is like a family. We feel teachers are on our side, not against us. They're challenging our minds . . . We don't think about them as teachers, we think about them as friends (Zane, 1994).

School size, alone, seems to be unrelated to students' satisfaction and attachment to their school. However, small focus schools can significantly improve students' attachment to their school and increase their positive perceptions of the schools' academic and social environment.

Parental Involvement

I felt I could predict which students would do well and which ones would do poorly and likely drop out . . . by parent participation (Motsinger, 1990).

Although parental participation in school and parental support of academic endeavors at home are strongly related to student retention and achievement outcomes (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Green and Sancho, 1990; Motsinger, 1990), little research has been conducted on the relationship between small school size and parental participation—although the few studies that address this issue have found a positive relationship. For example, when charters in Philadelphia hold "adult nights," parents will usually show up. One teacher explained: "With charters, parents are really involved. We invited 22 parents in for a Family Night and 17 showed up" (Fine, 1994, p. 10). The improved relationships between students and teachers at small schools probably spur more active involvement from the students' parents.

Larger schools, especially urban schools, are felt to be intimidating to parents as well as to students: "The school is a reminder of too many negative life experiences" (Motsinger, 1990, p. 5). Smaller schools with a community focus should be better able to overcome this barrier as consistent, long-term contact between students and teachers slowly fosters trust and deeper relationships among teachers, administrators, and parents. Furthermore, the democratic environment of smaller schools creates opportunities for parents to actively influence and shape the education of their children (Gregory, 1992). For instance, effective Local School Councils, a school governing body consisting of teachers, parents, and the school principal, in Chicago were three times more likely to be located in small schools. (Ryan, Bryk, Lopez, Williams, Hall, Cuppescu, 1997). A new middle school in Chicago even purposely designed space where parents could meet and conduct ongoing activities (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995).

However, improving parental participation will probably take time and sustained effort. Another empirical study that contrasted the parental involvement of charter and noncharter students attending

Research has found that small schools offer a curriculum that is equivalent in many dimensions to the curriculum of larger schools. Schools enrolling 400 or more students offer introductory and advanced courses at a comparable level to larger schools. An additional striking finding was that no more than 27 percent of students take advantage of courses uniquely offered by large schools (Monk, 1987). On average, not more than 12 percent of students took courses unique to large schools.

the same Philadelphia school found that parents of charter students tended to be more involved than parents of noncharter students, but this result was not statistically significant (Oxley, 1995).

More research needs to be conducted on the relationship between school size and parental involvement. Preliminary research suggests that smaller schools, especially focus schools, will be able to involve parents in the educational process better than large or traditionally structured secondary schools.

Summary of Research on Students' Social Environment

This review of the relationship between school size and students' social environment reveals four significant findings:

1. There is a consistent and often strong relationship between smaller schools, lower levels of alienation, and higher levels of positive student engagement.

2. Smaller school size especially seems to lower alienation and increase the participation of "at-risk" or marginal students. Small school reform offers an important mechanism by which students who are likely to become involved in delinquent behavior or drop out of traditional schools can be reintegrated into secondary education.

3. Focus schools increase the positive effects that small schools have on student outcomes. Thus, a commitment toward both small schools and "community" values seems necessary to significantly improve students' attachment to, and academic interest in, schools.

4. The effect of school size on a school's social environment is influenced by factors such as the cooperative administrative environment of the school. For example, decreases in school size foster collegiality among teachers and administrators, a consensus on the policy of the school, better and more personal relationships among students, and, hopefully, quicker responses to the needs and transgressions of students. These changes foster greater student engagement and reduce alienation of the students.

TEACHERS' SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Research on two aspects of teachers' social environment is reviewed here: professional climate and teacher satisfaction. "Professional climate" includes measures of the relationship of teachers to their administration; faculty consensus on the mission of the school; collegial relationships among faculty; and relationships with students that extend outside of the traditional teacher role, such as helping to run an extracurricular activity. "Teacher satisfaction" includes measures of teachers' feelings of effectiveness and control over their environment.

Professional Climate

School size is strongly related to a variety of factors that improve the professional environment of schools: more cooperative administrations; administrators' sharing decision-making power with faculty; higher levels of collegiality; smoother administration (the ability of administrators to effectively respond to problems); and clearer rules (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Gottfredson, 1985; Oxley, 1995; Pittman

and Houghwout, 1987). These effects are consistent and often very strong (see Table 6 in the Appendix). If no other factors are taken into account, in small schools with enrollments of up to 300 students, communal organization is better than the communal organization in 75 percent of all high schools. In contrast, large schools with 1,800 or more students possess communal organizations that are worse than 66 percent of all high schools (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988)[1].

As seen in the section on students' social environments, higher levels of collegiality and teacher involvement lead to significant reductions in students' alienation from their schools and increase students' attachment to their schools. Relationships between school size and other outcomes such as student alienation, and even achievement, may be mediated by differences in schools' cooperative administrations.

Although small schools foster better relationships among faculty members and are consistent with more efficient administrations, school size was not found to be directly related to innovative teaching and administrative practices, such as students keeping the same homeroom throughout high school, mixed-ability math/science courses, flexible class times, and interdisciplinary teaching teams (Lee and Smith, 1994; Lee, Smith, and Croniger, 1995). The failure to find a relationship between school size and innovative school reforms suggests that smaller size establishes the groundwork for deeper school reforms by improving and streamlining the relationship between faculty and administrators but, in itself, does not trigger these types of reforms:

> Alternative schools emphasize the importance of faculty knowing students and being able to respond, under the guidance of the principal, with appropriate programs. A substantial number of teachers and students stated that smallness is the sin qua non of such responsiveness. It seems apparent at the extreme ends of the spectrum that smallness makes communication, an important aspect of effective programming, more attainable. *But smallness alone cannot create satisfying relationships or academic focus* [emphasis added] (Foley and McConnaughy, 1982).

In order to implement reforms, supportive environments need to be established where teachers are encouraged to make changes and provided with time to interact and discuss substantial change with other teachers—and the environment of proactive change needs to be encouraged by the principal (Oxley, 1994). Technical assistance and training often are important for convincing people of the feasibility of change and providing teachers with alternative visions of education (Fine, 1994). In this type of environment, constant proactive small-scale change becomes the norm of the institution (Larson, 1991). In other words, teachers are constantly trying new things in the classroom in order to better respond to students' interests and incorporate their own interests into their teaching. Thus, while small schools foster collegiality and more efficient administration, they are related to innovative practices and reform only when the mission of the school is self-consciously dedicated to reforms.

Teacher Satisfaction

The strong relationship between small school size and cooperative administration suggests that teachers should feel more satisfied and effective in smaller schools. A review of the literature, however, reveals a contradictory and confusing picture (see Table 7 in the Appendix). One group of studies found a consistent relationship between smaller school size and higher levels of teacher efficacy and satisfaction. Two surveys and two case studies found a positive relationship between smaller school size and higher staff morale, higher levels of satisfaction, and higher levels of teacher enjoyment (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988; Gottfredson, 1985; Larson, 1991; Oxley, 1995). Furthermore, a case study of three schools that increased and decreased in size during the year of the study found that staff morale tended to decline in schools that grew in size and increased in schools that became smaller (Gottfredson, 1985). These results suggest that changes in school size have an immediate and causal effect on teachers' levels of satisfaction and perceived efficacy.

However, in other studies, smaller school size was found to be detrimental to teachers' satisfaction and efficacy. Two studies that comprehensively analyzed the relationship between teachers' sense of control/sense of satisfaction and a variety of school-level variables (such as level of school disorder) found that smaller schools actually had a negative effect on teachers' sense of control and satisfaction (Lee, Dedrick, and Smith, 1991; Rutter, 1986).

These contrasting results can be reconciled by considering the process by which small

[1]Endnote - See page 131

schools affect teacher efficacy and satisfaction. Research reviewed in earlier sections has established a consistent relationship between smaller school size, higher levels of cooperative administration, and lower levels of student disorder. The studies that found negative relationships between smaller schools and teacher attitudes controlled for the significant effects of cooperative administration and student disorder; in contrast, the studies that found a positive relationship between smaller school size and teacher attitudes did not control for these effects. Furthermore, one study that explicitly tested these mediating effects found that the positive effect of smaller school size on teacher satisfaction *was* mediated by higher levels of cooperation among administrators, teachers, and students and by reduced levels of school disorder (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). This analysis highlights the importance of studying the *process* through which small schools affect student and teacher outcomes in order to understand research findings[6].

Small theme schools seem to have an especially strong positive effect on teachers. For example, three school teachers in a Philadelphia charter reported to a researcher: "I'm back! I was burned out and now I'm revived in my charter" (Fine, 1994). Teachers in New York's alternative schools reported feeling "a sense of liberation, a powerfully satisfying feeling that their lives and work are beginning to acquire real meaning" (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995).

Teachers' satisfaction emerges from improved relationships with students and collegial support in the teaching enterprise. In an evaluation of eight New York alternative schools, 100 percent of teachers expressed satisfaction with work they were doing with students:

> We really help kids here . . . I have a sense of being needed and accomplishing something important (Foley and McConnaughy, 1982).

Teachers in Philadelphia charters echoed these feelings:

> Kids usually see me as a hard-ass, someone to avoid. The kids in the summer institute saw me as a nurturer, a father figure. They sought me out, and I felt something special for them, too. I feel more caring, and I've tried to relate in a more interpersonal way (teacher cited in Zane, 1994, p. 126).

Furthermore, teachers in schools with a strong sense of professional community gain rewards by working with and finding support from colleagues. Their feelings of meaningfulness and control often rise:

> It's better for individual teachers because theirs is not the only viewpoint on a student or class. They get ideas on how to handle a class because everyone has the same group (teacher cited in Fine, 1994, p. 12).

> If we think about our work as a team, no one of us had accomplished alone what we are now doing together (teacher cited in Zane, 1994, p. 127).

Not all teachers are positively affected by charters or other focus schools. Teaching in focus schools is demanding, in part because teachers assume new roles as administrators and guidance counselors in addition to their role as teachers (Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, 1995; Fine, 1994). Widespread reform movements and external resistance to these schools may add to this stress, especially when teachers do not actively choose to participate in focus schools but are convinced or coerced. In fact, some teachers in focus schools complain of overload and feelings of helplessness (Fine, 1994).

[6]Endnote - See page 141

The consistent lessons of these research findings are that intrinsic teaching rewards —such as positive relationships among teachers and between teachers and students—powerfully influence teachers' level of satisfaction. Surprisingly, extrinsic teaching rewards, such as levels of salary, are reported as having little or no effect on teachers' levels of satisfaction and sense of control (Lee, Dedrick, and Smith, 1991). Interestingly, Catholic school teachers show higher levels of satisfaction than public school teachers, even though they earn 70 percent of the salary of public school teachers (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993).

Summary of Research on Teachers' Social Environment

Smaller school size is related to cooperative administration, higher levels of teacher satisfaction, and higher levels of teachers' feelings of control. In addition, focus schools tend to have a stronger effect on these outcomes than would be expected simply from reductions in enrollment; in fact, these schools are able to resurrect and positively transform the enthusiasm and efficacy of some teachers. At the same time, smaller schools are also related to negative outcomes. Some teachers gain satisfaction from the broader resources of larger schools, while other teachers resist the heavy workload of communal schools. While these negative effects are much weaker than the positive effects of reducing school size, they suggest that small-school movements need to carefully negotiate reforms, and to educate and support teachers in performing new roles that are demanded by smaller schools.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

This section reviews the research on three types of academic achievement: (1) scores on standardized tests; (2) equity of education achievement, defined as the equal distribution of achievement across social class, ethnicity, and gender; and (3) other outcomes—the ability of students to gain credits toward graduation, pursue college careers, or find employment. An effective school is defined as a school with higher than average mean scores on comprehensive standardized tests, an equitable distribution of scores on standardized tests, and a substantial percentage of students who graduate from high school and go on to college or gainful employment.

Standardized Tests

Mean achievement as measured on standardized tests is the most studied indicator of school achievement. Between 1985 and 1995, 26 studies explored the relationship between school size and student achievement. Of these, 10 found a positive relationship between small schools and student achievement; five found a positive relationship between larger schools and student achievement; and 11 found no relationship between achievement and school size (see Table 10 in the Appendix). The findings, at first glance, appear incomprehensible.

Among the studies that have described a strong relationship between school size and student achievement is work by the American Legislative Exchange Council (1994), which found that higher S.A.T. and A.C.T. scores were related more to smaller school size than to race. Furthermore, there are indications that smaller schools may

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The effect of school size on dropout rates was, in one study, twice as strong as the effect of average socio-economic status (SES).

have an especially strong positive impact on the achievement of minority students. A study of schools that predominantly serve African-American and Latino students found that the relationship between smaller school size and higher levels of achievement was stronger than the relationship between achievement and the percentage of students below the poverty line (Public Education Association, 1992b).

The strong relationship between school size and schools' social environment suggests that the effect of school size on academic achievement may be mediated by the relationship of academic achievement to the social environment of a school. One study explicitly tested and found this effect. In Louisiana, smaller school size was related to higher student achievement on a battery of standardized tests. When attendance rate, percent of students suspended, and percent of students dropping out were also used to predict achievement, the effect of school size on achievement became nonsignificant. In other words, school size affects student achievement because it improves the social environment of schools—including attendance rates, percent of students suspended, and dropout rates, which in turn positively relate to students' average academic achievement (Franklin and Crone, 1992). These results suggest that the nonsignificant and negative results of other studies may be partially attributable to unstudied mediating effects[1].

The existence of some negative findings, however, suggests that large schools may encourage higher levels of achievement by, for example, providing students with science labs (Arnold and Kaufman, 1992) or providing advanced courses, albeit for only a small percentage of students. However, this effect appears much smaller than the positive effects associated with improving the general social environment of the schools. In addition, some research suggests that only larger schools situated in wealthier communities will be able to use their size to garner the additional resources and facilities that are necessary for more advanced courses. (Bryk, Lee, and Smith, 1990; Friedkin and Necochea, 1988).

This analysis suggests that average student achievement is higher in smaller schools than in larger schools. While small school size does not directly affect student achievement, it improves the social climate of a school, which, in turn, improves students' average level of achievement.

Equity in Achievement

The data indicate that size is of critical importance in black schools, so much so that reducing high school size should be of the highest priority in cities serving large black populations (Crain and Strauss, 1986, cited in Public Education Association, 1992b).

Research shows a consistent and often strong relationship between small school size and more equitable academic achievement across ethnicity and socioeconomic background—9 of the 11 reviewed studies found this relationship (see Table 10 in the Appendix). Smaller school size predicts higher academic achievement among minority students and students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds (Friedkin and Necochea, 1988). Two studies, for example, have found that African American students perform significantly better in the context of small schools than in large schools (Crain and Strauss, 1986; American Legislative Exchange Council, 1994).

[1]Endnote - See page 131

In addition, smaller school size reduces the gaps between the average achievement levels of white and African American high school students and between students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds who attend the same school (Lee and Smith, 1994). One study found that the gap in math achievement between white and minority students within schools was greater in schools with more disciplinary problems (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Lee and Bryk, 1989). Since smaller school size is associated with lower incidence of disciplinary problems (see Table 2 in the Appendix), school size may indirectly foster more equitable achievement by creating a more integrated, less stratified, and, therefore, less tense environment in schools.

Some findings suggest that smaller schools can most effectively serve low-income communities. One study found that smaller schools predominantly serving students with low socioeconomic status (SES) produced higher average math, reading, and language scores than larger schools serving similar student populations (Friedkin and Necochea, 1988). This same study also found that the average achievement of students attending larger schools predominantly serving students with high SES was higher than the average achievement of students attending smaller schools serving similar student populations. The magnitude of this effect, however, was half as strong as the negative effects that larger size had on student achievement in schools that predominantly serve students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These results suggest that students from low-income communities benefit the most from small schools. Reciprocally, they are hurt the most by large schools[8].

[8]Endnote - See page 131

Another set of studies found that smaller school size decreases the achievement gap between students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds who attend the same school. These effects are often quite strong—and generally stronger than the relationship between smaller school size and absolute school achievement (Lee and Bryk, 1989; Lee and Smith, 1994; Lee, Smith, and Croniger, 1995). One series of studies that analyzed a large, nationally representative sample of 820 schools found that students with higher SES learned, on average, more math and science between both 8th and 10th grade and 10th and 12th grade than students with low SES. However, this learning gap was significantly less in smaller schools —in small schools, the size of the difference between the amount of science learned by students with high SES and students with low SES in the first two years of high school was 10 times less, on average, than the comparable learning gap in large schools. In math, for this same time period, the learning gap between students with high SES and students with low SES was 2.4 points in large schools (based on a mean score of 42) and was approximately zero for students in small schools. Between 10th and 12th grades, the effect of school size on gaps in math and science learning became stronger in science and slightly weaker in math (Lee, Smith, and Croniger, 1995). These studies suggest that a school's structure partially determines who will achieve and whether differences in students' socioeconomic background will become academic differences.

Other Outcomes

Standardized tests can't measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, [or] ethical reflection. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts, and function, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning (Cross City Campaign, 1995, p. 11).

The ultimate test of a school is its ability to graduate students in a timely manner and provide them with the opportunity to go to college or to find a better job than they would without a high school degree. Students attending smaller high schools are more likely to pass their courses, accumulate credits (Fine, 1994; Oxley, 1990; Oxley, 1995), and attain a higher level of education than students who attend larger schools (Lindsay, 1984; Sares, 1992). All six studies reviewed found a positive relationship between smaller schools and better educational outcomes (see Table 9 in the Appendix).

Studies of charter and alternative schools have consistently found that they dramatically increase students' accumulation of course credits and increase the percentage of students who pass academic courses. A study of eight alternative schools found that students, on average, earned 60 percent more credits than they had earned during their last year of attending a traditional high school (Foley and McConnaughy, 1982). A large study in Philadelphia compared the rate at which students attending charter schools and students attending traditional schools passed courses. Students attending charters passed science, math, English, and history courses 4-to-9 percent more often than other students (Fine, 1994). These effects are more impressive when one considers that most charters in Philadelphia were formed in the 1990s; were never fully funded; and are, in many cases, still struggling to define their mission and

structure. Another, more recent study indicates that the effects of charter schools may grow as the charters become more coherent—if students and faculty are attached full time to their charter. This study found that students attending a charter full time or almost full time passed courses in science, math, English, and history seven percent to 20 percent more often than students outside the charter who attended the same school (Oxley, 1995).

National studies suggest that small schools have a long-term impact on students' academic careers. Two large surveys have found that smaller high school size is related to completing more years of college and graduate education, even when controlling for factors such as ability and high school achievement (Lindsay, 1984; Sares, 1992). Smaller school size fosters a positive environment that encourages students to participate and to complete high school—and may provide students with positive educational experiences that motivate them to pursue higher education.

A failure of contemporary research on high schools is that we do not know more of what happens to people once they leave high school: the paramount test of education is its ultimate applicability to people's lives. The information that has been collected, however, suggests that small schools are more effective in encouraging students to accumulate more credits and in pushing students to complete more years of higher education (Lindsay, 1984; Sares, 1992).

For Whom Are More Courses Better?

A television advertisement released in the middle of 1996 by the state of New Jersey argues that the ability of New Jersey's secondary schools to offer college-level courses in unprecedented numbers is a sign that the state's public education system works. But the ad fails to address how many students actually take these courses or if the courses affect the average level of student achievement. The existence of courses by themselves does not improve the quality of education.

One of the most frequently cited advantages of large schools over small schools is their ability to provide more diverse and extensive course offerings—and this ability, in theory, enhances educational quality by responding to the unique needs and interests of students who might benefit from remedial, advanced, or vocational courses. Research has confirmed that large schools offer more courses than small schools (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Forbes, Fortune, and Packard, 1993; Haller, Monk, and Tien, 1992; Haller, Monk, Bear, Griffith, and Moss, 1990; Monk, 1987; Pittman and Haughwout, 1987). At the same time, this and other research have challenged the assumptions that: (1) the curriculum of large schools is significantly better than the curriculum offered by small schools, and (2) a diverse curriculum is the best method for responding to the academic needs of students.

Research has found that small schools offer a curriculum that is equivalent in many dimensions to the curriculum of larger schools. Schools enrolling 400 or more students offer introductory and advanced courses at a comparable level to larger schools (Haller, et al., 1990; Monk, 1987), and, in any case, the additional courses offered in large schools do not provide widespread advantages for students. For example, one review found that large schools did not systematically offer any courses to students that were not also offered in schools with enrollments of 500 students (Monk, 1987). In addition, expected advantages in curriculum offerings were not found. Only 50 percent of large schools, on average, offered advanced placement courses in math, chemistry, and physics (Monk, 1987).

Thus, the resources of large schools were used to create curricula that lacked coherency and failed to offer consistently important new learning opportunities (Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, 1985; Monk, 1987).

An additional striking finding was that no more than 27 percent of students take advantage of courses uniquely offered by large schools (Monk, 1987). On average, not more than 12 percent of students took courses unique to large schools (Oxley, 1989). The hypothesized advantages of a diverse curriculum are realized by only a few students and fail to affect the average student except to deny him or her advantages that others are receiving. It is hard to justify the significant declines in the social environment of larger schools if their curricular advantages are enjoyed by a very small group of students.

Research that measures the number, diversity, and depth of course offerings assumes that more course offerings translates into a better education for students. However, curriculum diversity often translates into curriculum tracking, in which courses are designed to attend to the special academic backgrounds and needs of students:

Quite simply, it is easier to create a more internally differentiated academic structure in a larger school. The limited fiscal and human resources generally found in small schools preclude extensive organizational differentiation (Bryk, Lee, and Smith, 1990, p. 270).

Instead of enhancing students' achievement, academic tracking and differences in course taking patterns have been shown to increase achievement gaps between students from different social and academic backgrounds. Thus, an increased number of courses often leads to a differentiation of students that reinforces existing inequalities (Lee and Bryk, 1988).

In contrast, more focused and common curriculum, such as that found in Catholic schools, reduces the inequalities in subsequent achievement between students from different social and academic backgrounds (Lee and Bryk, 1988), and this effect appears to be strongest for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993). For example, lower middle class students in Catholic schools are achieving 4.5 years ahead of counterparts in public schools (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993). Instead of it being a deficit, the inability of small schools to differentiate students by offering a diverse curriculum seems to be an advantage. It forces small schools to teach a core academic curriculum in heterogenous classes—and this factor is associated with a higher and more equitable level of achievement among students (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Lee and Bryk, 1988; Lee and Bryk, 1989).

Thus, the theorized curricular advantages of larger schools fail to materialize in real life. In fact, academic differentiation associated with curriculum diversity actually stratifies students. As small schools develop and clearly define their mission, their coherent and focused course offerings, although relatively small in number, may provide a better and more equitable academic experience than a large number of unfocused and underutilized courses.

Student attendance rates in small, low-SES schools attained the same level as large schools serving students with high SES.

Summary of Results on Student Achievement

Small schools are related to slightly higher rates of absolute achievement. This is particularly impressive because smaller school size also predicts lower dropout rates, and one might expect that achievement would decrease as dropout rates decline because the "worse performing" students would be staying in school. The research, however, contradicts this notion and suggests that improving the social environment of a school can facilitate greater involvement and commitment of more students, which, in turn, will lead to higher levels of learning. Furthermore, smaller schools have an especially powerful impact on the average achievement of minority and low SES students, and they lead to more equitable distribution of achievement among students in the same school and to higher course passage rates.

CONCLUSION

The research suggests that smaller size has a strong effect on schools' social environment—including decreased violence and dropout rates—and students' sense of attachment to school. The improved social environment contributes, in turn, to students' improved academic achievement, including their ability to pass more courses and establish more positive long-term educational goals. Furthermore, the findings suggest that small schools are equally able to provide students with the core courses and skills they need.

Small schools' most powerful relationship to student achievement is their ability to improve the academic performance of minority students and students with low socioeconomic backgrounds. Among small schools, focus schools consistently have the strongest positive effect on outcomes: the sense of community focus schools build tends to strengthen the positive effects that smaller school size has on almost all measured outcomes.

ENDNOTES

[1]Although the growing consensus is that small schools provide students with a better education (Klonsky, 1995; Stevens and Peltier, 1994), research on school size has been unable to deliver the knock-out blow to advocates of large schools. Several researchers (Fowler, 1992; Lee and Smith, 1994) have found that, "The inconsistency in the research findings on the effects of high school size results from problems in the research: inconsistent definitions, weak methodology, and (primarily) the lack of a clear focus on what, precisely, might be affected by a change in school size and on the process through which those effects might work" (Lee and Smith, p. 5).

[2]The one study that found no relationship between school size and student participation in extracurricular activities was conducted on a sample of Catholic schools. This nonsignificant finding may be explained by two factors: 85 percent of Catholic high schools enroll fewer than 900 students (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993), and most Catholic schools score higher on measures of communal school environment than do public schools (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). Thus, enrollment in Catholic schools may have been too small on average to significantly affect student participation in extracurricular activities. It is also possible that the communal environments of Catholic schools create opportunities for, and foster, student participation in extracurricular activities regardless of size. Further research is needed to test these suppositions.

[3]The one study that found no results compared different house systems, smaller schools established in larger schools, in New York City high schools (Oxley, 1990).

[4]Two of the general studies failed to consider that the relationship between school size and student attachment may be affected by the relationships among student, faculty, and administrators or by the disciplinary climate of the school. One of the studies found that students were, on average, more attached to schools where the students, teachers, and faculty cooperated and knew each other better (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). In a second study, students were more attached to schools with a better disciplinary environment. As the previous sections have shown, a strong relationship exists between smaller school size, a more cooperative school environment, and a better disciplinary environment. Thus, the effect of school size on student attachment may be mediated by social characteristics of the school. The studies, however, failed to test for this possibility.

[5]One study found no relationship between school size and the level of schools' cooperative environments (Oxley, 1990). However, this study only looked at schools that used a house system —the house system may have improved the administration of the schools to the extent that school size no longer affected the collegiality and cooperation of teachers and administrators.

[6]Although the relationship between school size, cooperative administration, and student disorder explains the positive relationship between school size and teacher outcomes, it fails to explain the negative effect. This negative effect may emerge from the relationship between school size, class differentiation, and school resources. The greater resources and increased opportunities to teach advanced courses in large schools may enhance some teachers' feelings of efficacy and satisfaction (Lee, Dedrick, and Smith, 1991). This idea is supported by the fact that some teachers resist charter schools because they require them to give up teaching advanced placement courses (Fine, 1994).

[7]A review of the 16 studies that found nonsignificant and negative results concerning the effect of small school size on student achievement suggests that this relationship may have been obscured by the studies' failures to take into account mediating effects, the use of poor research designs, and the unavailability of proper analysis procedures. For example, in two studies, percent attendance may have mediated the effect of school size on achievement (Bobbet, French, and Achilles, 1993; Caldas, 1993). In another study, students' participation in extracurricular activities may have mediated the results (Howley and Huang, 1991). And in three other studies, staff problems (the level of cooperative administration) or discipline problems may have mediated the effect of school size on academic achievement (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993; Lee and Bryk, 1989). Thus, these nonsignificant or negative findings may be caused by the researcher failing to model indirect effects of school size on student achievement. It is important for researchers analyzing the effects of school size to model both direct and indirect effects—and, particularly, possible mediating relationships suggested by the past research on school size. Otherwise, policy recommendation may be flawed by drawing on misleading research.

Many of the 10 other studies that showed no or negative effects of small school size on achievement had other problems that weaken the reliability of their results. One study had serious methodological problems (Arnold and Kaufman, 1992); two studies sample 60 schools or fewer (Haller, Monk, and Tien, 1992; Luyten, 1993) and thus reduce their ability to detect differences among the achievement levels of different schools; and one study only looked at rural schools with enrollments below 1,200 and thus may have looked at enrollment differences that were too small (300 students versus 500 students) to find significant differences (McIntire and Marion, 1989).

Another general problem with research on school size is that it has not until recently had the mathematical tools to correctly model the effect of school-level variables, such as school size, on student-level variables like achievement (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992; Lee and Smith, 1994; Lee, Smith, and Croniger, 1995). Studies using new mathematical techniques have the advantage of modeling the growth of students' achievement from the 8th grade through their senior year in high school and of controlling for students' differential academic backgrounds that might, in turn, affect their high school achievement. Studies using these advanced techniques have found a relationship between smaller school size and increased growth in academic indicators (Lee and Smith, 1994; Lee, Smith, and Croniger, 1995).

[8]Haller, Monk, and Tien (1992) failed to replicate these results. However, they sampled only 47 schools while Friedkin and Necochea (1988) sampled 786 schools. Thus, their nonsignificant result may be attributed to their small sample size.

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APPENDIX

The following tables summarize research on small schools by indicating the relationships found by individual researchers between school size and ten outcomes:

- extracurricular activities;
- violence/disorder;
- dropout rates;
- student attendance;
- satisfaction with school and attachment to school;
- professional climate;
- teacher efficacy and satisfaction;
- students' aggregate achievement;
- equity in students' achievement;
- and other measures of achievement.

A positive sign (+) indicates a positive relationship between smaller school size and the dependent variable. "NS" means there is a nonsignificant relationship between school size and the dependent variable. A negative sign (-) indicates that the dependent variable increases as school size increases.

TABLE 1: EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Article	Results
Oxley (1995)	+
Holland and Andre (1994)	+
Oxley (1990)	+
Pittman and Houghwout (1987)	+
Gottfredson (1985)	+
Lindsay (1984)	+
Schoggen (1984)	+
Bryk, Lee, and Smith (1990)	NS

TABLE 2: VIOLENCE/DISORDER

Article	Findings
Zane (1994)	-
Franklin and Crone (1992)	-
Haller (1992)	-
Public Education Association (1992a)	-
Page (1991)	-
Oxley (1990)	-
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	-
Pittman and Houghwout (1987)	-
Gottfredson (1985)-General Survey	-
Fowler and Walberg (1991)	NS
Gottfredson (1985)-Case Studies	NS

TABLE 3: DROPOUT RATES

Article	Findings
Franklin and Crone (1992)	-
Fowler and Walberg (1991)	-
Oxley (1990)	-
Roweton and Bare (1990)	-
Felter (1989)	-
Toenjes (1989)	-
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	-
Pittman and Houghwout (1987)	-

TABLE 4: STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Article	Findings
Fine (1994)	+
Franklin and Crone (1992)	+
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	+
Foley and McConnaughy (1982)	+
Oxley (1990)	NS

TABLE 5:
STUDENT ATTACHMENT TO SCHOOL AND SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL

Article	Findings
Oxley (1995)	+
Lee and Smith (1994)	+
Zane (1994)	+
Oxley (1990)	+
Gottfredson (1985)-General Survey	+
Foley and McConnaughy (1982)	+
Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993)	NS
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	NS
Gottfredson (1985)-Case Studies	NS

Smaller high school size is related to completing more years of college and graduate education.

TABLE 6: PROFESSIONAL CLIMATE

Article	Findings
Oxley (1995)	+
Larson (1991)	+
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	+
Pittman and Haughwout (1987)	+
Gottfredson (1985)-General Survey	+
Foley and McConnaughy (1982)	+
Lee, Smith, and Croniger (1995)	NS
Lee and Smith (1994)	NS
Oxley (1990)	NS

"I'm back! I was burned out and now I'm revived in my charter!"

TABLE 7: TEACHER EFFICACY AND SATISFACTION

Article	Findings
Oxley (1995)	+
Fine (1994)	+
Zane (1994)	+
Larson (1991)	+
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	+
Gottfredson (1985)-General Survey	+
Gottfredson (1985)-Case Study	+
Oxley (1990)	NS
Lee, Dedrick, and Smith (1991)	-
Rutter (1986)	-

The study found that smaller school size positively affects teachers' efficacy and satisfaction by improving the social environment of the school. At the same time, it found that large school size increases teachers' efficacy and satisfaction by providing them with more resources. However, the positive effect of small school size on social environment was shown to be much stronger than the positive effect of larger school size on teacher efficacy and satisfaction overall; teachers in small schools feel more in control of their work and satisfied with their work than teachers in large schools.

TABLE 8: EQUITY IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Article	Findings
Lee and Smith (1996)	+
Lee, Smith, and Croniger (1995)	+
American Legislative Exchange Council (1994)	+
Lee and Smith (1994)	+
Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993)-Sample of Catholic and Public Schools	+
Arnold and Kaufman (1992)	+
Lee and Bryk (1989)	+
Friedkin and Necochea (1988)	+
Crain and Strauss (1986)	+
Luyten (1994)	NS
Haller, Monk, and Tien (1992)	NS

The study found that small schools lead to a decrease in the achievement gap between males and females. It also found that school size had no effect on the achievement gap between white and minority students and between students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the study estimated achievement in a way that substantially distorted its findings.

TABLE 9: OTHER MEASURES OF ACHIEVEMENT[1]

Article	Findings
Oxley (1995)	+
Fine (1994)	+
Sates (1992)	+
Oxley (1990)	+
Lindsay (1984)	+
Foley and McConnaughy (1982)	+

[1]These measures include percentage of students who pass courses, students' accumulation of course credits, and students' enrollment in higher education.

TABLE 10: STUDENT AGGREGATE ACHIEVEMENT	
Article	**Findings**
Lee and Smith (1996)	+
Lee, Smith, and Croniger (1995)	+
American Legislative Exchange Council (1994)[1]	+
Lee and Smith (1994)	+
Franklin and Crone (1992)	+
Public Education Association (1992a)	+
Fowler and Walberg (1991)	+
Bryk and Driscoll (1988)	+
Friedkin and Necochea (1988)	+
Crain and Strauss (1986)1	+
Kearney (1994)	NS
Luyten (1994)	NS
Bobbet, French, and Achilles (1993)	NS
Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993)-Sample of Catholic and Public Schools	NS
Caldas (1993)	NS
Haller, Monk, and Tien (1992)	NS
Sares (1992)	NS
Howley and Huang (1991)	NS
Lee and Bryk (1989)	NS
McIntire and Marion (1989)	NS
Garden (1987)-Freshman Sample	NS
Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993)-Sample of only Catholic Schools	-
Forbes, Fortune, and Packard (1993)	-
Arnold and Kaufman (1992)	-
Garden (1987)-Sample of high school seniors who pursued math as a substantial part of their education (12% of all high school seniors were included in this category)	-
Illinois State Board of Education (1985)	-

[1]Results compiled from references in the article.

The only safety net you have is that if you have been focusing on rigor and caring, the children survive your growing pains without losing academically. You're not allowed to have them lose academically while you're growing.

chapter

The Effects of Size of Student Body on School Costs: New York City High Schools

by Patrice Iatarola with
Leanna Stiefel, Norm Fruchter,
and Robert Berne

I think that sometimes in small schools, you can be so busy with relationships that you forget the rigor that you're teaching. The fact remains that children learn all the time, so we're always on.

Across the country, school reformers, parent groups, community organizations, business enterprises, and professionals are joining together to create new schools and school communities that meet children's learning needs. Yet, in too many other settings, schools continue to fail our children.

Practice and research repeatedly show that many different factors need to be combined to create effective schools: there is no single formula or recipe. But if there is a common theme across many current reform strategies, it is that the large, factory model of schooling is not effective for teaching and learning, especially for at-risk students. Smaller student bodies seem to be more effective.

The new public secondary schools in New York City—such as those begun as New Visions Schools, as well as those Coalition Campus High Schools formed by Deborah Meier and her colleagues in the Center for Collaborative Education, or other individual schools created by community, parent, and business groups—all have consistently smaller numbers of students than most existing high schools. This does not mean that it is impossible to restructure and improve high schools with large numbers of students. But even when this is accomplished, such as at Andrew Jackson High School in New York City, reducing the effects of large size is part of the restructuring remedy. In fact, small-size student bodies are often defined by reformers and parents as the key ingredient in the mix of factors necessary to create effective learning environments and school communities for high school students.

The movement to create smaller, more effective schools is taking place in the context of severe fiscal stress, especially in large urban school districts. In New York City during the last two fiscal years, almost $2 billion has been cut from an inflation- and enrollment-neutral base budget for primary and secondary education. When combined with a New York City school expenditure substantially less per student than the statewide average before these cuts, schooling resources are becoming considerably more scarce. The fiscal stress has affected New York City high schools even more severely, because the Board of Education has attempted to buffer elementary and middle schools, directing more of the cuts toward the high schools. The New York City Board of Education's School-Based Budget Reports reflect these policies: per-pupil budgeted expenditures for the 1995-96 school year were $6,831 for high school students and $7,229 and $7,591 for elementary and middle school students, the reverse of the relationship that exists in most other places.

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Given the prospect of constrained fiscal conditions for public education for the foreseeable future, it is essential to know the cost implications of all aspects of education reform—and particularly the effects of school size on cost. When small schools are attacked, it is often because they are considered "too expensive." However, the question of whether small schools cost more than large schools in expenditure per pupil is still very much open to debate.

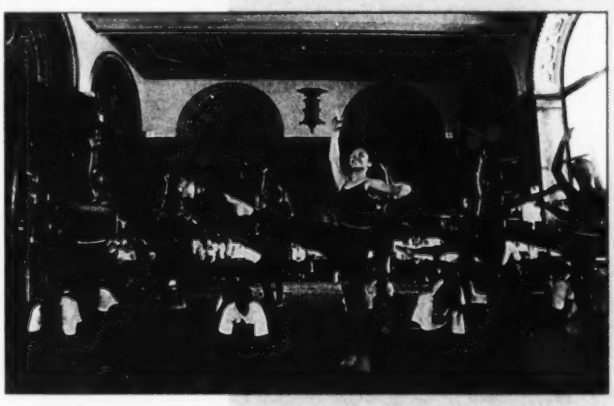
In an effort to provide answers to this question, the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University is in the process of assessing the effect of school size on costs in New York City public high schools. This chapter—which identifies critical issues to consider in designing research on the cost of small schools—is based on this ongoing work.

It is important to note that we are discussing the dollar costs ("inputs") of schools. Robert Gladden's review in this volume of the school size literature thoroughly summarizes the "outputs" of small schools and clearly demonstrates the positive results of small school size on students achievement and participation, and on teachers' satisfaction. The studies in Gladden's review do not include costs, and we feel that it is important that both costs and outputs be considered together. While we focus on costs, we also take outputs into account. (We are following the conventions of the fiscal equity field when we use "outputs" in reference to what, in the educational field, are called "outcomes.")

Before discussing the major conceptual and modeling issues involved in designing research on school costs, this chapter will review the literature that examines the relationship of school size and cost.

THE LITERATURE ON ECONOMIES OF SCALE

The argument that small schools are more expensive than large schools is often grounded in the theory of economies of scale: increasing all inputs (capital, labor, materials, and students) proportionately (by the same percent) may lead to lower per-pupil costs, up to a point. This might occur for larger schools for a number of reasons—some inputs might be bought in bulk, at lower prices per unit; some types of physical plant might be used more effectively (for example, more intense use of common spaces such as gyms and cafeterias); varied curricula might be offered more cheaply; some inputs (such as administrators) may be indivisible and their costs might get spread over more pupils; and some specialization and division of labor might occur, for example when teachers offer more advanced courses in their subjects. However, generally, at some point, diseconomies of scale (higher per-pupil costs) will set in because of rising prices of inputs or an inability to manage a larger school.



Thus, the essential question is: How do per-pupil costs change when the scale of the school is proportionately increased (or decreased)?

Costs are a function of the prices of inputs and the quantity of output, given a constant state of technology. In the public school setting, average costs per pupil are

COSTS V. PRODUCTS

Assessing the costs of a school solely on the basis of cost per student assumes the student is the "output."

Other "products" or measures that should be considered in evaluating cost effectiveness include:

- Graduation rates
- Accumulation of credits towards a degree
- Average daily attendance

a function of the size of the student body, exogenous (external) variables, the quality of outputs, prices of inputs, quality of inputs, and the nature of technology.

Estimating average costs in public schools is complicated for a number of reasons:

1. The nature of the output is complex. What is the product? Is it simply the students who attend a school? Or who graduate? Or must the students meet some relevant instructional standard or level of academic achievement? With service-oriented organizations such as schools, the quality of outputs varies greatly, and the difference in quality is difficult to measure, thereby limiting the suitability and appropriateness of most average-cost models.

2. In the private sector, the average-cost model is driven by the profit motive, which in a competitive setting supposedly induces firms to minimize costs. But there is no similar motivation in the public sector to minimize costs. Thus, using data on existing schools will not necessarily help us determine minimum costs per pupil for different size schools.

3. Another complication that arises in applying the average-cost model to schools is the assumption that to minimize costs, a free choice of inputs must be available. Whether this choice exists in a public school system that allocates funds based on formulas, limiting an individual school's ability to control its internal reallocation of funds, is questionable (Michelson, 1972).

Output-related studies that do not control for costs may be capturing only part of the relationship between school size and student achievement. In essence, the issue of cost is being ignored. Yet, clearly, studies that control for costs or examine the relationship between cost and some measure of output must grapple with quite complex modeling problems. One source of variation among the research findings thus far stems from the differences in approaches to conceptualizing and examining the relationship between costs and outputs. The difficulties inherent in modeling such a relationship are exacerbated by limited data availability. Some studies, for example, only use district-level data rather than school-level data because of the relative availability of such information, restricting their conclusions to economies of scale in terms of district size.

Nevertheless, size/cost research studies, and resulting data, have been accumulating at an increasing pace. When we consider the body of this literature, we conclude that researchers have reached widely varying conclusions about the existence of economies of scale and the effect of size on the average costs of schools. Some studies have found evidence of economies of scale in larger schools (enrollment greater than 900).

RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL SIZE AND COST

Elchanan Cohn's study, *Economies of Scale in Iowa High School Operations*, found that in the long run, the cost curve for high schools is "U" shaped, the optimal size of a school being 1,500 students (Cohn, 1968). Cohn's research came amidst the move-

ment to consolidate rural school districts, which began in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s—the main impetus was James Conant's work that advocated school district consolidation in order to take advantage of economies of scale through larger comprehensive high schools (Conant, 1959, 1967). Since that time, the intradistrict equalization litigation of the 1970s, as well as the movements to close schools as enrollments declined in the 1980s, has kept the spotlight on economies of scale arguments for maintaining larger high schools.

The implication of the U-shaped curve is that long-run average costs decrease as size increases until average costs are minimized at a certain size (1,500 in Cohn's research). Costs then begin to rise as size increases, until there are diseconomies of scale. Cohn estimated his long-run cost curve by incorporating both short-run operating costs and long-run capital costs. Using only operating expenditures at the middle and elementary school level, (Riew, 1986) found economies in middle schools with enrollments as large as 1,024; but at the elementary school level, the greatest economies he found were in schools with 200-400 students. His earlier study of operating expenditures in high schools concluded that beyond an enrollment of 900, the existence of economies is questionable (Riew, 1986).

Cohn and Riew did not directly include measures of constant quality outputs in their models. Rather, both related expenditures to size while controlling for quality. Cohn developed an index that incorporated the change in test scores, teachers' salaries, class size, and other variables as proxies for quality. Similarly, Riew used teachers' education and experience, schools' environment and utilization, and other variables to capture differences in quality while relating school size to operating expenditures.

In 1992, the Public Education Association (PEA) of New York issued two reports on the benefits and potential cost effectiveness of small schools, in terms of both operating and capital costs. The PEA report argued that economies of scale associated with larger schools with traditional administrative designs can be overcome by smaller schools that take advantage of flexible administrative arrangements, such as teachers assuming administrative responsibilities. PEA could not find any study that supported economies of scale beyond a school size of 1,800 (PEA, 1992a). Additionally, PEA argued that it is conceivable that economies related to the nature of capital (buildings) may be surmounted if cost-effective approaches such as competitive bidding, shared and multiple use space, and renovation are used in constructing new small schools (PEA, 1992b).

Overall, the findings from the cost research vary considerably. Studies conclude, for example, that there are negative, constant, U-shaped, or no relationships between size and average costs (Chabotar, 1989; Watt, 1980; Callan and Santerre, 1990; Kumar, 1983; Bee and Dolton, 1985). Not one of the studies could find a direct relationship between size and average costs for schools with enrollments less than 1,000. There is no evidence from the body of cost studies we examined that small schools cost less than medium-size schools, those with enrollments between 400 and 1,000.

MAJOR DESIGN ISSUES

There are a number of essential issues that a study attempting to capture cost differences based on school size needs to address in its design. These include the definition of a "school," differences in student populations and programs among schools, and definitions of "outputs."

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SCHOOL

Throughout the previous discussion, we have used, but not defined, the term "school." But because our New York City study will use school-level data, rather than district- or student-level data, it is essential that we define what constitutes a school. The strategy of reducing the effects of school size by organizing a large high school into smaller units within the same building illustrates the need to have a workable definition of a school that is not solely dictated by, but is compatible with, resource and cost data.

We suggest using four characteristics to classify an instructional unit as a school (and note that none of these is based on the nature of the physical facility of the unit):

1. The unit makes program and staffing decisions.
2. The unit has an identifiable budget.
3. The unit awards a diploma.
4. An individual or group of individuals in the unit is responsible for leadership.

According to our definition, an instructional unit that has all four characteristics constitutes a school.

PROGRAMS AND STUDENT POPULATIONS

To more accurately reflect the relationship between size and costs, a study needs to incorporate variations among schools in organizational or programmatic settings and student populations. Conceptually, there are several ways in which schools differ. These distinctions must be accounted for, and/or controlled for by researchers:

1. There are organizational differences associated with various types of schools, such as academic, comprehensive, vocational, or alternative—the major categories of high schools in New York City. Costs may vary on the basis of these organizational differences. Often, academic/comprehensive high schools have an elaborate, hierarchical organizational structure with teams of assistant principals and department chairs in each subject area. In contrast, alternative high schools tend to integrate the administrative responsibilities of assistant principals and department chairs into their staff structure without explicitly budgeting for those positions. An accurate reflection of cost variances between schools must account for these differences by school organization or type.

2. Specific programmatic differences, whether they encompass an entire school or affect specific student populations within a school, will have varying implications for costs. The needs of at-risk students or the needs of gifted students are commonly addressed through varieties of programmatic initiatives. Schools have also sought to address wider social issues that have an impact on the development of students by, for example, establishing health clinics and daycare programs. The costs of these special programs, and how these costs are allocated across a school, need to be considered.

3. Urban school systems, in particular, face the costs of bringing students for whom English is a second language to a level of proficiency in English. The wide array of native languages and skill levels of students complicates this task.

4. Schools are developing different approaches to educating students designated as in need of special education, and these strategic differences lead to variations in programmatic costs. The decision to integrate special education students in a general education classroom setting, or to place them in a self-contained special education classroom setting, is increasingly being made at the school level. All these variations, some of which are accounted for in allocations formulas, will have an impact on costs and on the level of resources received by a school.

5. Grade organization among high schools may vary considerably. Some schools are traditionally organized as 9th through 12th grades; others include 7th and 8th grade levels; still others concentrate on the 10th through 12th grades. Differing grade organizations may entail differing costs, and the impact of these differences must be considered.

In New York City, these conceptual issues pose significant challenges to designing a research model that appropriately captures differences in program and student populations. At the high school level, New York City public schools offer a variety of programs in addition to the ones mentioned above, including internships, work study, peer education, and collaborations. The majority of alternative high schools in New York City, which are also the first wave of small high schools, may serve populations of students, such as former dropouts, who are significantly different from those served by many of the larger academic/comprehensive schools.

Incorporating these differences in a quantitative model of school cost is a difficult task. One approach is to supplement the quantitative study with a qualitative analysis to more fully identify, for example, differences in programs and student populations among schools of varying size. Thus, for our study of New York City schools, we conducted interviews with principals or assistant principals in a sample of eight schools in order to collect information that is not reflected in the available data. The sample was selected so that the schools varied in size but had similar student populations and programs.

STUDENT OUTPUTS

Assessing the costs of schools of varying sizes based solely on ratios of cost per student implies that the student is the "output" of the service production of schools. But what do schools produce and what measures will reflect the success or failure of the schooling production process? Are the successes or failures related to costs and school size? Are costs and constant quality outputs related to the size of a school? We will explore the first question by identifying some of the more commonly known output measures, correlates, and proxies, and discussing the realities of the data constraints. The

subsequent questions will be briefly discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Potential measures—and potential complications—for assessing the quality of a school's outputs include:

1. The rate at which students graduate from the school. If the numerator in the calculation of this rate is the number of graduates, then what is the proper denominator? Should it be the number of students the school identifies as candidates for graduation, or the number of students entering secondary school four years prior? The latter measure, if used, must be adjusted for mobility at the school level. That is, students who have moved in and out of the school during the four years must be counted to accurately gauge the population of interest—students who have graduated plus those who are still enrolled plus those who have dropped out of school. (Note that small schools that opened within the past few years may not yet have graduating classes.)[1]

2. Accumulation of credits toward a degree. This measure is appropriate when it can be standardized across degrees and schools. However, New York City public high schools do not have a standard definition of course credit or a standard Board of Education promotion policy based on course credits. Our interviews with the sample of eight small, medium, and large high schools revealed considerable variation among schools in simply defining a credit. One school, for example, uses Carnegie Units with 225 minutes of instruction per week as a measure of credits, but also allows credit for

[1]Endnote - See page 147

COMPARING APPLES WITH APPLES

Any fair and accurate comparison of costs across schools of different sizes must take into account the many variations in school organization, program and student population.

- **How is the school organized?** Academic, comprehensive, vocational and alternative schools have different management structures (e.g. academic high schools often have teams of assistant principals and department chairs, whereas alternative schools tend to integrate administrative responsibilities into other staff roles).

- **What programs does the school offer and who participates in them?** Many schools offer students internships, work study, peer education, health clinics, daycare programs and special academic programs for students with different achievement histories. Many times, small schools have students who dropped out of other schools and require different educational approaches. The costs of these programs and how these costs are allocated across a school need to be considered.

- **How are the students prepared before entering the school?** Urban schools, in particular, have students with a wide range of preparation levels. City schools are more likely to have a large numbers of students for whom English is a second language. The wide array of native languages and skill levels increases the cost of a quality education.

- **How are students designated "in need of special education" educated?** Descisions to integrate students designated as needing special education into general education classrooms or placing these students in self-contained classrooms have a significant impact on costs and on the level of resources received by a school.

- **What grade levels does the school include?** Grade organization among high schools may vary considerably. Some schools are traditionally organized as 9th through 12th grades; others include 7th and 8th grade levels, still others concentrate on the 10th through 12th grades. Differing grade organizations may entail differing costs.

A SCHOOL IS NOT A BUILDING

Figuring out the costs of a school requires defining what a school is. Small schools push the envelope and demand a definition of places where kids learn that takes into account more than bricks and mortar.

- Does the "school" make program and staffing decisions?
- Does the "school" have an identifiable budget?
- Does the "school" award diplomas?
- Is an individual or group of individuals in the "school" responsible for leadership?

internships. Another school is applying for an alternative assessment waiver, but currently grants credits for successfully completing courses of 180 minutes of instruction per week. Credits for cooperative education programs also add to the non-standardization, especially if they are not well monitored.

An additional difficulty with measuring credit accumulation arises from schools that may use alternate evaluations of progress, such as portfolio assessment. The purpose of portfolio assessment is to take into account more diversified measures of progress than simply accumulating credits, in order to more accurately assess students' skills and educational level. But the complex nature of portfolio assessment has thus far made standardization very difficult. Until differences among assessment tools and between assessment and credit accumulation can be accounted for and appropriately quantified, it will be difficult to develop an "appropriately comparable" school-level measure of output.

In the absence of standard or reliable data on credit accumulation and portfolio assessment, one might use available data on the number of students enrolled in courses in a subject area and the percent failing the courses, defined as earning a grade lower than 65 percent. Alternatively, the percent passing might prove acceptable. But, at least in New York City, the aggregation of the data by subject area provides no distinction regarding the particular course, the level of the course, or the standards of each individual course and teacher.[7]

3. Average daily attendance. Attendance, on its own, is not what we normally consider an output, although the probability for better outputs may increase with higher rates of attendance. However, there may be little variation in attendance across schools, especially if attendance is linked to any funding allocation formulas. This presents a primary obstacle to using attendance as an output measure.

COST AND DATA ISSUES

In addition to these issues about schools, programs, and students, there are also a number of factors concerning cost and data availability that have to be taken into account when designing a study of the relationship between school size and cost. This section outlines two of the major challenges: allocation formulas and cost measurement issues.

ALLOCATION FORMULAS FOR HIGH SCHOOLS

The priority of our New York City study is to evaluate the relationship between a school's costs and the size of its student body. But doing so irrespective of how funds are allocated to schools would only reveal part of the overall relationship among size, costs, and funding. The New York City Division of High Schools allocates tax levy funds, which include state and local operating aid, to schools on formulaic and discretionary bases. Although most funds are distributed by the allocation formulas, high school superintendents and the Division of High Schools also distribute some discretionary funds to support local mandates or initiatives.

[7]Endnote - See page 147

Although economies of scale are implicitly incorporated into the formula for basic support, to what extent does a school's size and the composition of its student enrollment, such as the proportion of general versus special education students, affect the level of tax-levy funding received? What is the magnitude of discretionary allocations and is their distribution related to size?

In our study, we may be able to answer such questions by replicating the allocation formulas and by analyzing the actual allotment of discretionary units. But reproducing the formulas, which we initially thought was a simple task, is proving to be a difficult exercise that is consuming more time and resources than we originally thought. Once the replication is completed, the study will be able to formulate scenarios that will vary different components of the formulas, such as the number and type of students and the mixture of mainstreamed and self-contained classroom settings for special education students.

Such simulations will provide a clearer understanding of the impact of the multiple components of the formula on the flow of resources to schools. For example, a school emphasizing the mainstreaming of its special education students will have a different flow of resources than a school that does not implement significant mainstreaming, even though each school might have the same number and type, or classification, of special education students. Furthermore, rather than simply describing in mathematical terms how the presumption of economies of scale is embedded within the formulas, simulations will illustrate the difference in resource flows to schools of varying sizes.

[1]Endnote - See page 147

COST MEASUREMENT ISSUES

Any successful study of the relationship between school size and costs must identify which costs to include and specify methods for taking into account the variations in data availability. The following sections discuss these issues.

Cost Versus Budgeted Versus Actual Data

The first issue that confronts researchers attempting to study costs is the difference between the data available and the concept being measured. Costs, as discussed earlier, are dollar values of (minimum) resources needed to produce a constant quality output. Available data are usually either budgets, which are projections of expenditures, or actual expenditures themselves—measures of what will be, or is, spent. These may not be the same as costs in the sense that they may not keep constant the quality of output or may not be the minimum that could be spent. Nevertheless, most studies use budgets or expenditures and then control for other factors, in hopes of coming close to the cost concept.

There are important differences between budgeted data and expenditures, and the choice researchers face in deciding which measure to use is often constrained by the availability of data. Our New York City study faces such constrained choices —budgeted data, for example, are more readily accessible than expenditure data.[1]

The next sections examine the issues of which costs to include and how to categorize them, as well as the limitations of the sources of data.

Ongoing Versus Start-Up Costs

New schools face costs associated with start-up activities, such as capital expenditures for furniture and equipment. Additionally, newer schools may face higher operating costs related to organizing staff and operations. Most important, newer schools may have higher per pupil costs as they gradually take on more students until they reach their optimal level of enrollment. The issue of distinguishing or disaggregating start-up costs from ongoing costs will be of primary concern for any study that is evaluating new small schools.

Operating Versus Capital Costs

Capital expenditures are made for items that have a useful life of greater than a year. Utilizing capital costs is essential for modeling long-run cost curves and scale economies. But in the New York City study, the limits of the available data are pushing us toward using only operating costs. The unit data do not reflect capital expenditures, and the school-based reports do not include funds from the capital budget. Debt service, which may serve as a proxy for capital expenditures, is reflected in the school-based reports under "Other System-Wide Obligations," along with retiree health and welfare costs, special investments, and forced savings. These expenditures are allocated to schools on a per capita basis. Yet, there are instances where the amount allocated to schools varies from the stated per capita level. In most cases the variation is minimal. But in a few cases, the variation is significant, with little or no documentation as to what is driving the difference. In addition, the costs of debt service are attributed to all schools, including those that lease space, which overstates the capital costs of those schools.

Object of Costs

Ideally, costs should be categorized according to the object of expenditures, such as personnel and other-than-personnel services (OTPS). However, at the present time, the Division of High Schools in New York City is unable to strip confidential personnel information from the unit data in order to release it to researchers. Even if the data were to be available in such a disaggregated format, there is a risk of misidentifying the budgeted units coded as teachers, because it is not clear what function these budget lines serve—are teachers engaged in direct instruction, staff development, or administrative roles? Sorting out the costs of direct instruction versus support versus administrative overhead for the purposes of relating various disaggregations of cost to performance, and of identifying the possibility of economies of scale, is quite difficult without a more reliable distinction of personnel budget lines.

Cost Versus Funding Sources

Linking costs to the different funding sources is one of the main goals of the New York City study, because different policy goals are mandated by different funding sources, such as federal Title 1 or state compensatory education funds. The unit data will allow us to break down the sources of funding, in turn allowing us to get a sense of a school's programmatic organization. But the initial school-based reports do not link federal and state categorical funding to objects or actual functions; instead, they report the total amount of categorical funding for each school, but do not identify the positions or OTPS that such funding supports. (Future reports, the Board of Education indicates, will correct these deficiencies.)

RESEARCH PLAN

Quantitative analyses are often driven by the availability and quality of data. To better understand the impact of data limitations on our quantitative study of New York City high schools, we conducted interviews in a sample of eight schools. This section briefly describes those interviews and outlines our planned quantitative analysis.

INTERVIEW PHASE

As previously mentioned, the sample for our interviews was selected so that schools were as similar as possible except in terms of size. In our interview questions, we asked school principals or assistant principals to enumerate and describe their student populations, programs, standards of assessment, and treatment of special education students. The purpose of these questions was to clarify differences among schools that might not be reflected in the quantitative data, even when socioeconomic differences are controlled.

Another series of questions focused on sources of revenue that also might not be reflected in the available data, including gifts and grants from private individuals or foundations; scholarship funds; parent association funds; and other types of funds raised by students, parents, or the school itself. Assessing the true costs of schools in relation to constant quality outputs requires us to account for all resources used or available for use, including in-kind services and materials. While we will not be able to collect such information for all high schools in New York City, we will be able to assess differences among those schools in the interview sample.[4]

Quantitative Analyses

Two financial databases—unit and school-level budget reports—are being developed. Each will be linked to a third database made up of output and control variables. We intend, at least initially, to develop ratios, such as budget or unit per graduate, or budget or unit per percent of students passing state-level competency exams. The budget or flow of resources will be

[4]Endnote - See page 148

disaggregated by student type (general, full- or part-time special education students) to the extent possible and linked in a ratio format to the output measures for those types of students.

More complex models of the relationships among budgets and units and outputs will be developed using statistical regression analysis. School size will be incorporated into the models to assess its relationship to outputs and budgets. An assortment of measures will be used to represent outputs, including data on graduates from the candidate and cohort graduation data sets, percent passing reading and math competency exams, percent passing a variety of the State Regents exams, and percent passing courses by subject area. Numerous control variables are available, such as ethnicity, gender, English proficiency, poverty, and attendance. The details of the models have yet to be worked out, but care will be taken to match the appropriate costs to outputs based on student types.

Our research plan includes examining the interview information in a more thorough and systematic manner, drawing conclusions from the information and supplementing the quantitative work with the interview information. Simulations of the allocation formulas are also a component of our design. The simulated scenarios are intended to broaden our understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the formulas and their impact on resource flows. Finally, we will proceed with the quantitative analyses—relating costs, outputs, and school size.

ENDNOTES

[1] In New York City, an additional complication arises because there are different classifications of graduates: Regents, local, and certificate. And there are still further complications because there are two types of data available from the New York City Board of Education about graduates, and both types have limitations. The first set of data, the "candidate" data, provides information on the number of candidates for graduation as well as the number of candidates that have graduated, by type of diploma. A student who has not been identified as a candidate by the school, but actually graduates, will not be reflected in the number of graduates in this data set. In addition, these data are unadjusted for student mobility. The second set of data, the "cohort" data, provides information by class cohort on the number of students who have graduated, dropped out, remained enrolled, or been discharged. Class cohort is defined as students entering 9th grade in a particular year plus students entering 10th-12th grades in the subsequent three years, less those students transferring or leaving the school for another educational setting.

[2] For example, in our New York City study, if one were to ask in what proportion of students are taking and passing courses in earth science, biology, chemistry, or physics, the researchers would not be able to answer because particular types of courses are not identified. In addition, all students in 9th-12th grade are included in the data, and we are not able to distinguish which students, by grade, are taking which of the various levels of English courses offered at a school. These data problems are compounded by the fact that teacher and course quality are not constant across courses and schools. Moreover, the school-level data do not allow us to identify those students who may be retaking the course after initially failing. Yet without identification, such students will be double-counted within the data.

Here is another example of data problems: In New York City, high school students must take and pass competency exams in six subject areas to graduate with a local diploma. Should a student wish to graduate with a Regents-endorsed diploma, the student must pass at least nine Regents examinations in various subject areas. Data are available on the number of students taking an exam and the number passing or failing the exam. Using these pass or fail rates as alternative measures of constant quality outputs appears to be a viable option. But these data are not without limitations analytically. The main problem arises from the possibility that failing students are retaking the exam in the same year, thus being double-counted.

[3] There are two types of cost data connected with our New York City study. *Unit data* are in the form of unit allocations to schools. The unit system funds positions rather than individuals, theoretically giving every school the opportunity to hire personnel without being constrained by salary levels. Each unit is equivalent to the average teacher salary, depending on the source of funding. For example, there are unique average teacher salaries for units allotted for general and special education (tax levy funds) and for units funded by federal and state reimbursable sources. Average salaries for all pedagogic and administrative personnel are indexed in relation to the average teacher salary. Thus, the personnel line for a principal will have a unit value greater than one and the line for a paraprofessional or teacher's aide will have a value less than one.

As previously stated, schools receive local tax levy funds on formulaic and discrete bases. These units, as well as units based on state and federal reimbursable funds, are accounted for in the Table of Organization for each school. Private funds that flow through the Board of Education to the school level, such as the funds made available to schools through the Annenberg Challenge Grant, will also be listed on the school's Table of Organization. But not all private funds flow through the Board. Those funds that do not, may or may not be significant and may be impossible to identify without the cooperation of each school that receives private financial support. The interview segment of our study, described in the design section of this chapter, sought out information regarding private funds raised from internal and external sources.

Using the unit data gives researchers the ability to identify nearly all sources of funds and match them to the appropriate student populations. In addition, the availability of the detailed unit allotment of tax levy funds allocated by formulas and by discretion allows researchers to study the impact of the formula in relation to school size. This is of particular interest with units allocated through the special education formula.

School-based budget report data detail school budgets by function and by type of student. In addition, the reports detail the level at which funds are actually budgeted, for example at school, district/superintendency, or central office sites. Tax-levy funds and state operating aid are grouped together, and categorical funds from federal, state, and private sources are each listed separately.

It is important to note some of the more limiting aspects of the school-based budget report data here. First, the per student budgets are based on *gross enrollments*, including long-term absentees. But at the high school level, tax-levy funds are allocated on the basis of *net* registers, which *exclude* long-term absentees. Moreover, state funding is allocated on the basis of *average* daily attendance. Thus, using gross registers, as the budget reports do, may not be entirely accurate. Second, the reports define a school according to categories of official recognition by the central Board of Education. Thus, the reports subsume the costs of alternative programs and schools within schools into the costs of the parent school. This practice may conflict with the definition of a school that our New York study established as a guideline. Third, the actual costs of leases are attributed to those schools operating under the leases. Since it is primarily the small schools that lease space, the small schools will appear to be more expensive per pupil unless a comparable measure of capital expenditures for large schools is introduced. Fourth, average teacher salaries calculated at the district level, rather than school-specific salaries, are used throughout.

During the initial stages of the study, we expected to be able to gather cost data in unit form from the New York City Division of High Schools. But in November 1996, New York City Public Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew released school-based budget reports in a dollar format. While these reports may provide schools, parents, and communities with a greater understanding of how city education funds are spent, the reports do not resolve the conceptual issues of defining costs for the purposes of this study, because budgets are not costs and the initial reports are based on budgeted figures rather than actual expenditures although subsequent reports promise to provide both budgeted and expenditure data.

Preliminary analysis of the information collected through the interviews reveals that, irrespective of size, each school faces unique student populations. The programs that schools offer vary and do not appear to be related to size.

Schools appear to be taking traditional approaches in their treatment of special education students. While all schools mentioned mainstreaming special education students as a priority, little evidence of innovative practices was cited. The exception was one small school that has a special inclusion program where every special education student is in regular classes for all but one or two periods per day, the opposite of the traditional approach. Unanswered by the interview responses is the extent to which students are or are not identified as in need of full-time special education and the relationship to school size for funding purposes and instructional practice.

The interviews revealed that all of the medium and large schools received funding for planning and/or parent or staff development under the Goals 2000 program, while only one of the small schools received such funds. But the revenue information that we gathered during the interviews is limited on two accounts. First, grant funds flowing directly to teachers are not identified. Second, the reliability of some of the information may be questionable. Reported revenues from vending machines is an example of the potential limitations of the information: most schools obviously understated the funds they receive from vending operations.

Although the conclusions are preliminary and a more thorough analysis of the information will take place, the interviews did give us a better understanding of the conditional nature of the available quantitative data.

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Resource List

The following is a partial list of individuals and organizations who are working on various aspects of small schools. We recognize that this list is not exhaustive and that many others are doing excellent work in this area.

Bank Street College of Education
610 West 112th Street
New York, NY 10025
212/875-4710
fax#212/875-4753
Contact: Frank Pignatelli, Chair of Educational Leadership Department; Etta Proshansky; Esther Rosenfeld; Herb Rosenfeld; and Gil Schmerler.

Yearly conference focused on small schools, faculty in graduate school/department with extensive experience in small schools, and the development of educators who work in small schools.

Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community Development
77 Clinton Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11205
718/797-3702
fax#718/797-3862
Contact: Frank Spradley, Principal

Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community Development provides a comprehensive course of study that actively engages students in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to adapt to a multicultural, scientific, and technological society. Students draw upon community resources in preparation for the world of work and higher education. Banneker graduates are socially responsible life-long learners prepared to promote all aspects of community development and to meet the challenge of the twenty-first century.

Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
17 East Monroe Street, Suite 212
Chicago, IL 60603
312/641-5570
fax#312/641-5454
Contact: Jeanne Nowaczewski, Staff Attorney

BPI is a public interest law and policy center which has been working on behalf of underrepresented groups in the Chicagoland area (public school constituents, community-based organizations, etc.) for the past twenty-seven years. BPI's currently works to create and maintain small schools and promote small schools philosophy in Chicago Public Schools.

Central Park East High School
1573 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10029
212/860-8935
fax#212/876-3494
Contact: David Smith, Director

Central Park East is a nationally known school that focuses on developing critical thinking skills through a series of questions called "Habits of Mind." Students graduate through portfolios that emphasize performance based assessment.

Chicago Annenberg Challenge
115 South Sangamon Street, 3rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60607-2615
312/413-5869
fax#312/355-0856
Contact: Ken Rolling, Executive Director

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge makes grants and sponsors programs designed to improve student achievement and support innovation and collaboration within networks of Chicago public schools.

Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center

222 Merchandise Mart Plaza, Suite 400
Chicago, IL 60654
312/329-9100
fax#312/329-6203
Contact: Allen Bearden, Assistant to President for Educational Issues/Quest

The Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center was established in 1992 with a generous grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. It has five main purposes: To act as a citywide catalyst for restructuring teaching and learning; to provide intensive support for Quest Schools; to help schools implement their own plans for restructuring student improvement; to work with schools who want to learn about innovations for achievement; and to be a clearinghouse for information on educational issues, models and research on restructuring while nurturing teacher leadership and collaboration.

Chicago Vocational Career Academy (CVCA)

2100 East 87th Street
Chicago, IL 60617
773/535-6100
fax#773/535-6633
Contact: Dr. Betty Despenza-Green, Principal

Chicago Vocational Career Academy was selected in 1997, by the United States Department of Education, as one of the five "New Urban High Schools" in the nation to serve as a model for secondary education reform. The Academy is comprised of eight mini-schools (career clusters) that combine a rigorous core academic curriculum with extensive vocational/technical training and actual work experience in the areas of: Business and Finance, Communications, Construction, Health, Hospitality/Food Service, Manufacturing, Transportation and other fields (Cosmetology, Barbering, and Horticulture).

Coalition of Essential Schools

Brown University, Box 1969
Providence, RI 02912
401/863-3384
fax#401/863-2045
Contact: Amy Gerstein, Executive Director

The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), founded in 1984 by Theodore R. Sizer, is a national network of schools and centers engaged in restructuring and redesigning schools to promote better student learning and achievement. The schools share a common set of ideas known as the "Common Principles" which guide their whole-school reform efforts.

Community School District Two

333 7th Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10001
212/330-9444
fax#212/330-9480
Contact: Anthony Alvarado, Superintendent

Community School District Two in New York City covers most of central Manhattan and houses over 40 schools that serve 21,000 students. District Two is a kindergarten through 12th grade, standards-based educational system that provides an accountable, world class education for every student through a redesigned labor management system that supports high performance learning communities utilizing the New Standards "performance standards" and assessments.

Community School District Three

300 West 96th Street
New York, NY 10025
212/678-2880
fax#212/932-3883
Contact: Patricia A. Romandetto, Superintendent

District Three's theme "In Pursuit of Excellence" is indicative of their ongoing commitment to quality education and improved academic achievement. The fulfillment of this commitment and the realization of their goals require the efforts and support of the entire District Three family—students, parents, staff and Community School Board members—who have worked diligently to build a climate of excellence throughout the district. District Three consists of twenty-one large schools and fourteen small schools, serving students from Central Park to the Hudson River and from just below Lincoln Center to just above Columbia University, with an extension over Central Park to Fifth Avenue.

Community Service Academy

4600 Broadway
New York, NY 10040
212/567-2589
fax#212/942-0826
Contact: Naomi Smith, Teacher/Director

Through a combination of student-centered, academically challenging curriculum, and reflective service-learning projects which stress community outreach, the Community Service Academy creates an environment which educates the whole student to become a confident, motivated, and critical learner who possesses a deep respect for and awareness of self, peers and both local and global communities.

Designs for Change

6 North Michigan Avenue, Suite #1600
Chicago, IL 60602
312/857-9292
fax#312/857-9299
Contact: Dr. Barbara Argumedo, Director of the Academy for Urban Change

Designs for Change focuses on educational research and reform. Their basic mission is to serve as a catalyst for major improvements in the public schools serving the 50 largest cities in the country, with a particular emphasis on Chicago. Nationally, they offer advocacy training to groups interested in school change.

East Brooklyn Congregation High School/Bushwick

1495 Herkimer Street
Brooklyn, NY 11233
718/385-6071
fax#718/498-7170
Contact: Shirley Edwards

East Brooklyn Congregation High School/ Bushwick is rooted in the theme of community service and built on the foundation of giving students future leadership skills and the greatest opportunity for academic success.

Field Elementary School

7019 N. Ashland Avenue
Chicago, IL 60626
773/534-2030
fax#773/534-2189
Contact: Rachel Garza Resnick, Principal

Field School is a large elementary school that is organized into "small schools." Each small school is responsible for developing a curriculum following their educational focus.

Hunter College and Campus School

71 East 94th Street
New York, NY 10128
212/860-1267
fax#212/289-2209
Contact: Dr. Anthony Miserandino, Director

The Hunter Schools (elementary & high schools) are for the intellectually gifted students in NYC. Visitors are welcome and the school is available for field based/action research.

International High School

3110 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101
718/482-5455
fax#718/392-6904
Contact: Eric Nadelstern, Principal

The International High School, a multicultural alternative educational environment for recent arrivals, serves students with varying degrees of limited English proficiency. A collaborative project between the New York City Board of Education and LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York, International H.S. offers a high school/ college curriculum combining substantive study of all subject matter with intensive study and reinforcement of English.

John Bartram High School

66 Elmwood Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19142
215/492-6450
fax#215/492-6117
Contact: Mrs. Linda Ahmed, Acting Principal

John Bartram High School is a comprehensive school of 3,200 students which consists of eightsmall learning communities at five different sites.

Manhattan International High School

317 East 67th Street
New York, NY 10021
212/517-6728
fax#212/517-7147
Contact: William Ling, Principal

The Manhattan International High School is a New York public alternative high school that serves an entirely limited English proficient immigrant student population.

Morris High School

1110 Boston Road
Bronx, NY 10456
718/542-3700
fax#718-991-0117
Contact: Lourdes Garcia, Principal

As part of a new initiative at Morris, the instructional program has been divided into six academies. Each academy emphasizes a different career theme.

New Visions for Public Schools

96 Morton Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10014
212/645-5110
fax#212/645-7409
http://www.newvisions.org
Contact: Sara Schwabacher, Vice President

New Visions for Public Schools is a private, not-for-profit organization that aims to improve the quality of education children receive in New York city's public schools.

The New York City Museum School

333 West 17th Street, Room 322
New York, NY 10011
212/675-6206
fax#212-675-6524
Contact: Sonnet Takahisa and Ron Chaluisan, Co-Directors

Representing an academic tradition of excellence, intellectual rigor, and high standards, the New York City Museum

School benefits from a unique collaboration between Community School District Two and museums in New York City. The wide range of collections offered by the American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Children's Museum of Manhattan, and the Jewish Museum provide opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and a renewed spirit of inquiry. The range of natural and human phenomena documented and reflected in the objects presents exciting possibilities for experiential learning that has as its core critical and creative problem solving. Through research projects, students develop their individual oral, written, mathematical, computational, scientific, visual and technological skills as they observe, study, discuss and reflect in the galleries and behind-the-scenes of the city's major museums.

North Philadelphia Community Compact for College Access and Success

Philadelphia Education Fund
7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Suite 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215/665-1400
fax#215/864-2494
Contact: Rochelle Nichols Solomon, Director

North Philadelphia Community Compact for College Access and Success is a school, college, and community collaboration focused on K-16 reform. The Compact is a project of the Philadelphia Education Fund.

The Peace School

2400 South Marshall Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60623
773/534-1700
fax#773/534-1688
Contact: Linda Young, Lead Teacher

The Peace School creates and maintains a community in which educators, parents and students work together for the development of peaceful values. This focus helps create a student-centered learning environment that encourages cooperation, critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills, all of which, it is believed, will lead to higher academic achievement by the students.

Philadelphia Education Fund

7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway,
Suite 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215/665-1400
fax#215/864-2494
Contact: Warren Simmons, Executive Director

As a partner for social change, the Fund convenes a wide array of groups to work together with schools to provide vision, strategies, and resources that support program innovation and improvement. In all its work, the Fund seeks to change schools to benefit children and revitalize communities.

Piccolo Elementary School

1040 North Keeler Avenue
Chicago, IL 60651
773/534/4425
fax#773/534-4248
Contact: Linda Sienkiewicz, Principal

Brian Piccolo Specialty School is the home of small schools with big ideas. There are four small schools in operation with another one in formation.

Research for Action International House

3701 Chestnut Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215/823-2500
fax#215/823-2510
Contact: Jolley Bruce Christman, Principal

Research for Action is committed to the belief that education can only improve when schools become learning organizations not only for students but for teachers, administrators, and parents. RFA turns the traditional concept of research inside out by working with school stakeholders to define their own issues and questions, collect information to address them, evaluate data, and then chart new directions based on findings. RFA also seeks to inform the national dialogue about effective schools through collaboration with other educational reform groups, reports, articles, speaking engagements, videos, and telecommunications.

The Robert F. Kennedy Community Middle School/High School (RFK)

75-40 Parsons Boulevard
Flushing, NY 11366
718/969-5510
fax#718/969-5524
Contact: David Seinfeld, Principal

RFK is a 5th through 12th grade educational facility. Students perform Community service in addition to their normal coursework.

The Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Institute for the Arts and Technology

47-07 30th Place
Long Island City, NY 11101
718/472-5671
fax#718/472-9117
Contact: Terry Born and Juliana Rogers, Project Directors

The Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Institute for the Arts and Technology serves 700 students in 7th through 12th grade in a challenging program incorporating arts and technology small

subjects areas. The school is unique in its relationship to LaGuardia Community College, its career education component and its commitment to guidance and nurturing of its students and staff.

School for the Physical City (SPC), an Expeditionary Learning Center

55 East 25th Street
New York, NY 10010
212/683-7440
fax#212/683-7338
Contact: Mark Weiss and Candy Systra, Co-Directors

SPC, a 6th through 12th grade secondary school, uses the city as a curricular starting point and expeditionary learning as its teaching philosophy. The school uses the New Standards as the basis of portfolio assessment in core subject areas: humanities, math and science.

Small Schools Coalition

One First National Plaza
21 South Clark Street, Suite 3120
Chicago, IL 60603
312/853-9168
fax#312/853-1214
Contact: Catherine D. Graham and Mia Barricini, Co-Directors

The Small Schools Coalition is a coalition of school reform organizations, principals and teachers who come together to support and promote small schools within Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The Coalition works with CPS and in the individual schools to create and foster more personalized learning environments.

The Small Schools Workshop

The University of Illinois at Chicago
115 South Sangamon
Chicago, IL 60607
312/413-8066
fax#312/413-5847
Contact: Mike Klonsky, Co-Director

The Small School Workshop works with schools and school districts to restructure and create smaller learning environments. The Workshop also provides a broad range of professional development opportunities for teachers.

Talent Unlimited High School (TUHS)

300 East 68th Street
New York, NY 10021
212/737-1530
fax#212/737-2863
Contact: Ira Shankman, Principal

Talent Unlimited High School is a selective high school with a challenging academic and performing arts curriculum which demands commitment and excellence. The arts are used as a means to connect all areas of the curriculum and make the learning experience more coherent. TUHS' mission is to develop students to their highest potential in the arts, humanities, and sciences by the use of a multi-cultural, inter-disciplinary approach to curriculum and instruction.

United Federation of Teachers

260 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
212/598-9253
fax#212/260-6393
Contact: David B. Sherman, Vice President

The United Federation of Teachers is the local affiliate of the AFT in New York City, representing 130,000 members. The union is very involved in educational reform, professional development, standards implementation, parent collaboration, small school support and teacher quality issues, amongst many things.

University Heights School at Bronx Community College

University Avenue & West 181st Street
Bronx, NY 10453
718/289-5300
fax#718/295-7572
Contact: Deborah L. Harris, Principal

University Heights (U.H.) is a 6th through 12th grade school on the campus of Bronx Community College. U.H. is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and graduates all students through portfolio assessment. Students learn through completion of interdisciplinary projects connected to five domains of learning.

West Humboldt Park Education Network (WHPEN)

DePaul University Center for Urban Education
2320 North Kenmore Avenue, Suite #302
Chicago, IL 60614
773/325-7278
fax#773/325-7741
Contact: Evelyn Rodriguez-Perez, Program Facilitator

WHPEN is a network of 13 schools in the West Humboldt Park area who meet monthly to collaborate on school related issues. The network consists of: Lowell Elementary; Pablo Casals Elementary; Morse Elementary; Morton Elementary; Munoz Marin Primary; Alfred Nobel Elementary; Orr Community Academy High School; Piccolo Elementary; Piccolo Middle; Ryerson Elementary; Laura Ward Elementary; and Richard Wright Elementary.

For Further Reading

Individuals interested in additional reading on small schools/school size can consult the following recent works. We recognize that this list is not exhaustive and suggest it only as a starting point.

"**The Big Benefits of Small Schools**," by Deborah Meier, *Educational Leadership*, September 1996.

"**To Build a Community of Learners, Start by Thinking Small**," by Paul D. Houston, *Leadership News*, October 1996.

Chartering Urban School Reform: Reflections on Public High Schools in the Midst of Change, edited by Michelle Fine, 1994, Teachers College Press, New York, NY.

"**Dumbing Down by Sizing Up**," by Craig Howley, *The School Administrator*, October, 1997.

The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America From a Small School in Harlem, by Deborah Meier, 1995, Beacon Press, Boston, Mass.

From Dream to Reality: Three Chicago Small Schools, by Ben Joravsky, 1997, Small Schools Coalition, Chicago, Ill.

"**High School Size: Which Works Best and for Whom?**" by Valerie Lee and Julia Smith, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Fall 1997.

***New York Times* Series on New Visions Small Schools:**

"**A Big Answer for Public Education: Small Schools**," Sara Mosle, *The New York Times Magazine*, May 28, 1995.

"**New Schools Seeking Small Miracles**," Sam Dillon and Joseph Berger, *New York Times*, May 23, 1995.

"**A Bridge from Hope to Social Action**," David Gonzalez, *New York Times*, May 23, 1995.

"**When Teachers Unite to Run School**," David Firestone, *New York Times*, May 24, 1995.

"**Islands of Change Create Friction**," Sam Dillon, *New York Times*, May 25, 1995.

"**One Urban Solution: Small Schools**," by Michael Klonsky and Pat Ford, *Educational Leadership*, May 1994.

"**An Optimal Size for High Schools?**" by Gerald W. Bracey, *Phi Beta Kappan*, January 1998.

"**Organizing Schools into Small Units**, " by Deborah Meier, *Phi Beta Kappan*, 1994.

"**Personalizing New York City High Schools: The Coalition Campus Schools Project**," by Alice Weaver, *NCREST*, 1994.

"**A School that Really Works: Urban Academy**," by Mary Anne Raywid , *Journal of Negro Education*, 1994.

"**Small Classes, Big Possibilities**," by Charles M. Achilles, *The School Administrator*, October, 1997.

Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story, by Michael Klonsky, 1995, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Small Schools: A Reform that Works, by Mary Anne Raywid, 1997, Small Schools Coalition, Chicago, Ill.

About the Editors and Contributers

Michelle Fine is Professor of Psychology at the City University of New York, Graduate Center. Her recent books include ***Becoming Gentlemen*** (with Lani Guinier and Jane Balin, 1997); ***Off White: Reading on Society, Race, and Culture*** (with Linda Powell, Lois Weis, and Mun Wong, 1996); ***Chartering Urban School Reform: Reflections on Public High Schools in the Midst of Change*** (1994); ***Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race and Gender in American Schools*** (1992); ***Disruptive Voices: The Transgressive Possibilities of Feminist Research*** (1992); and ***Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban High School*** (1991). She works nationally as a consultant to parents' groups, community groups and teachers unions on issues of school reform. She was recently awarded the Janet Helms Distinguished Scholar Award.

Janis I. Somerville is a Senior Associate with the University System of Maryland and Director of the National Association of System Heads (NASH) state systems' K-16 network. She has spent her career working at the community level in both K-12 and university education. She began her career as a high school teacher in Trenton, N.J. and for several years worked in higher education in North Carolina, both as college dean and as the director for service-learning for the state. During the 1980's she worked primarily in university settings, responsible for undergraduate education at both Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. She was also the founding director of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative. She is currently the staff director of NASH, a network of state university systems and K-12 leaders from throughout the country working on coordinated education improvement strategies.

Jacqueline Ancess, Ed.D is associate director at the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research and publications include studies on innovative urban high schools, authentic assessment, and accountability. Formerly, she spent 23 years in the New York City public schools during which time she was an English teacher, founding director of Manhattan East Junior High School in East Harlem, and director of alternative schools and educational options in two districts. In 1985 Ms. Ancess received the New York Alliance for the Arts in Schools and Culture Award. She co-authored ***Alternative Assessment in Action: Studies of Schools and Students at Work*** (Teachers College Press, 1995).

William Ayers is a school reform activist, Professor of Education, and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is co-director of the Small Schools Workshop, co-founder of the Annenberg Challenge in Chicago and co-chair of the Chicago School Reform Collaborative. His books include ***The Good Preschool Teacher*** (Teachers College Press, 1989) and ***To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*** (Teachers College Press, 1993) which was named Book of the Year in 1993 by Kappa Delta Pi and won the Witten Book Award for Distinguished Work in Biography and Autobiography in 1995. His latest book is ***A Kind and Just Parent: The Children of Juvenile Court*** (Beacon Press, 1997).

Kenneth Foster is a doctoral student at the City University of New York Graduate Center in the social/personality psychology program. He is conducting research with African American community activists and is focusing on issues of empowerment and racism.

Anne Galletta is a graduate student at the City University of New York Graduate Center, where she studies with Michelle Fine on issues related to educational equity and community participation in school reform. **Gina Beldo, Patricia Ortiz,** and **Carol Turitz** have been active in the development of the new small schools that their children attend and in promoting parent involvement in a number of new small schools in New York City.

Robert (Matt) Gladden is a research assistant at the Consortium on Chicago School Research working on a study of small schools in Chicago being conducted by the Bank Street College of Education in collaboration with the Consortium. He also provides research assistance for a variety of other Consortium projects. He received his B.A. from Wesleyan University in Connecticut and recently received his master's degree in social/personal psychology from the City University of New York Graduate Center. He is interested in the construction of small, intimate learning communities and the relationship between community and school experiences and is striving to compete a Ph.D. in social/personality psychology.

Camilla Greene is an eighth grade Language Arts teacher at Rippowam Magnet Middle School (a Coalition of Essential Schools school) in Stamford, CT. She has returned to teaching after a two year sabbatical in which she worked as a senior associate at the Annenberg Institute of School Reform at Brown University. As a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools Citibank Faculty, she is a coach consultant working with teachers in New York, New Haven, Philadelphia, and Chicago.

Linda Jucovy has been involved in education for more than twenty years as a teacher, writer, and editor. Her work has included writing—and editing others' writing—about citywide school initiatives, school-to-work transition, adult literacy, and alternative education for dropouts. Previously, she taught writing classes for open-admissions students at Queens College and Hunter College. She has a doctorate in English language and literature from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Olivia Ifill-Lynch is the director of The School for Academic and Athletic Excellence, a middle school in New York City's District 3 that focuses on teaching the whole child through academic rigor, athletic participation and arts instruction. She has been an educator for over twenty years and was also the founder and director of The Partnership School, a public elementary school whose mission was to engage educators, parents and community in the academic and social success of its students. As an independent consultant, Ms. Ifill-Lynch develops programs, writes curriculum, hosts workshops and speaks on educational issues throughout the United States. She is currently pursuing doctoral studies at Columbia University.

Patricia Maunsell is the Cross City Campaign's Director of Communications and leads the organization's teaching and learning program area. She is a former Chicago public high school teacher and program director for several national advocacy organizations that focus on children and education, including the Children's Defense Fund.

Lupe Prieto is the director for the Schools and Community program area at the Cross City Campaign and coordinates the organization's small schools program. She worked as a teaching assistant for two years in a special education classroom for pre-primary children prior to joining Cross City at its' inception in 1993 and is committed to parent and community organizing as a critical and necessary component in the struggle to achieve academic excellence for all students and their families.

David Sherman is the vice president of the United Federation of Teachers. He is a product of New York City public schools and was a teacher in Districts 23,4 and 13 before going to the Central Board of Education where he worked in the area of funded programs. In his current capacity at the UFT, he oversees the union's educational programs, serves as a liaison to the school system, represents the UFT with outside organizations and is involved in lobbying for school funding. He has participated in the last five contract negotiations. Currently, he is actively involved in New York City in implementing New Standards, instituting performance driven budgeting, making professional and curriculum development "come alive", assisting and redesigning low achieving schools, restoring arts education and fighting for budget enhancements.

Renee Jones Welch is a Senior Program Associate with the Small Schools Workshop (SSW) at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she works to facilitate the restructuring of Chicago Public Schools by working with school communities to develop smaller, more personalized learning environments. She is currently completing doctoral studies in Educational Policy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has a bachelor's degree in finance and a master's degree in education from UIUC, with additional training in team building, conflict management, and school improvement.

Acknowledgments

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform could not have produced this book without the contributions of a great many people. We would like to extend a special thanks to Michelle Fine and Jan Somerville for their vision, wisdom, and enthusiastic support throughout this project. This book would not have come to fruition without their unflagging passion for and commitment to the small schools movement. We are privileged to work with them. We also want to give special thanks to Linda Jucovy for her outstanding editing work and constant good humor as she wove the many voices presented here into one volume. We thank the staff, students and parents from New York's P.S. 261 and the staff, students and parent from COMETS and Creiger Multiplex in Chicago for their willingness to share the joys and struggles of the small schools in which they study and work. Cross City staff members Eva Brady Moon, Chris Warden and Diana Lauber were invaluable to the process, reading many drafts, making helpful comments and providing good ideas and encouragement throughout. We would also like to thank our colleagues at the Small Schools Workshop, particularly Mike Klonsky; Pinzke Design, especially Nancy Pinzke, Audrey Twohey, and Jane Ignacio; the Small Schools Coalition; Denise Gaska, our copy editor; and Jon Randolph, our photographer.

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- New York University's Institute for Education & Social Policy for use of the excerpted chapter from their study, **The Effects of Size of Student Body on School Costs and Performance in New York City High Schools** (to be published Spring 1998).

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PRAISE FOR

Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools

To meet the challenge presented by our growing economy and to make good on our promise of quality education for all children, we must raise academic standards and aggressively accelerate the performance of schools serving those students who have historically been underserved. ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** provides thoughtful advice for everyone who wants to create schools where all students are expected to achieve at high levels. This volume shows that, contrary to popular wisdom, "personalized" and "rigorous" are decidedly not incompatible ideas.

◆ ***Kati Haycock**, Director; The Education Trust*

The Cross City Campaign does it again! A clear and compelling vision for what will make urban schools work. In ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** educational reformers will find the research for why we must create small schools and a practical guide for making them happen. The stories from inside small schools are real and re-connect us with a simple truth: We must know our children in order to teach them.

◆ ***Jolley Bruce Christman**, Principal; Research for Action*

For far too long, many of this nation's urban public schools have reinforced the inequities that are prevalent throughout our society. In New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities, parents, students, teachers and community leaders have been quietly working to eradicate educational inequities by developing small learning communities. It's time for these small, personalized, rigorous schools to be the norm. ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** provides a much needed road map for leaders in our urban communities who are struggling to develop schools where equality, justice and opportunity are common practice. Our children and our nation deserve nothing less.

◆ ***Hugh B. Price**, President and CEO; National Urban League*

The need to improve and preserve our public schools is an urgent one. Public schools are the cornerstone of our democratic society and we cannot surrender to school failure and the abandonment of our neediest [illegible] unperceived attacks on public schools. There is no reason why schools can't succeed for all children today as they have for so many in the past.

Teachers, parents and students must play a part in any school improvement efforts. They must be given support and assistance to ensure that our public schools work, not rhetoric or politically motivated schemes with no educational foundation.

Encouraging the creation of small schools is one very important way that we can achieve high levels of student achievement. ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** is a valuable guide for those who want to learn how collaborative, educationally-based efforts can create learning environments that benefit all our children.

◆ ***Sandra Feldman**, President; American Federation of Teachers*

Anonymity is the name of the game in large urban schools. Teachers, students and parents often co-exist without really knowing each other. Over time, this isolation has created deep fissures between teachers, students, parents, schools and their communities. In our ever increasing global economy, we can ill afford to allow children to fall through these cracks. ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** and its advocacy of small learning communities provides a way to bring communities and schools back together in the name of educating all children to the very best of our ability.

◆ ***Robert F. Chase**, President; National Education Association*

Urban places creating and arguing the merits of small schools! One hundred years of policy based on the premise that "bigger is better" is now being challenged by urban folk who argue persuasively that small size is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for providing a quality education for all students. ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** shares the voice of urban teachers, administrators, parents and children who are finding success in small scale organizations. Conventional wisdom has held that small size is a weakness not a strength. Those of us in rural education look forward to learning from and making joint cause with our urban colleagues for the educational benefits made possible by small schools.

◆ ***Paul Nachtigal**, National Director; Annenberg Rural Challenge*

The new small school campaign is as old as the Republic. It embodies a movement for American education that imagines a school as an intimate learning community for development, democracy, healing and human rights.

◆ ***Luis Garden Acosta**, President and CEO; El Puente*

As a strong proponent of the small school concept, I wholeheartedly support personalized, interdisciplinary education in which stakeholder collaboration/participation is an integral component of program development and implementation. ***Small Schools, Big Imaginations*** is a virtual blueprint for the establishment of some of the most effective and innovative methods to turn such vision into reality, and to help students excel and succeed in their academic endeavors, professional careers and personal lives. Just as significantly, such an instructional system provides intelligent, responsible and contributory citizens for our future society and all of humanity.

◆ ***Betty Despenza-Green, Ed.D.**, Principal; Chicago Vocational Career Academy*

CROSS CITY CAMPAIGN
For Urban School Reform

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